HOUSE of the SUN

8

Taamo

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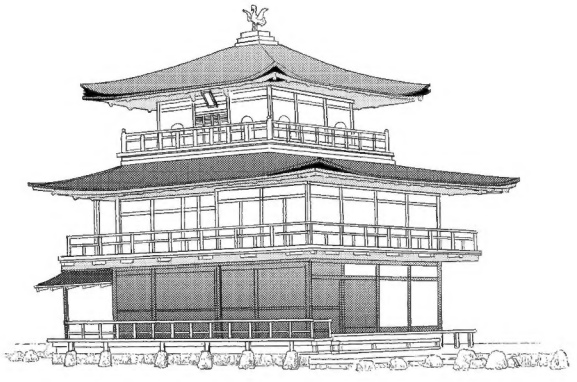
8

by Taamo



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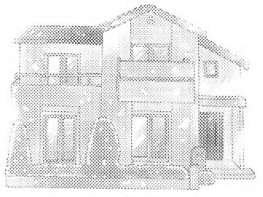
CHARACTER

Mao Motomiya
Second-year high school student. Without a place to call home, Mao moves into Hiro's house. Mao is secretly writing an online autobiography under the pen name Kukai.

Roommates



Hiro Nakamura
Businessman with housewife tendencies. Mao's childhood friend. He's been working to protect their home ever since his parents died in his third year of high school. He's watching over the house, hoping to once again live with his sister and brother.

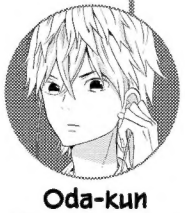
Friends

Brothers

Class-mates

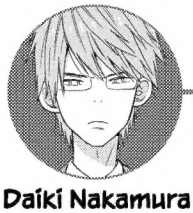
Co-workers

Chi-chan (Chihiro)
Mao's friend. She likes Oda-kun and confessed to him, but...



Oda-kun
Mao's classmate since first year. Had a thing for Mao, but was rejected and is heartbroken.

Sugimoto-san
Hiro's coworker. She's a fan of Mao's novel. Her nickname is "Radical." She likes Hiro.



Daiki Nakamura
Hiro's little brother. In his second year of high school. He moved in with an uncle after their parents died, but he has decided to return to the Nakamura house.

STORY

After her father gets remarried, Mao feels like she no longer has a home. Aiming for independence, she is now staying with her childhood friend Hiro.

Hiro's younger brother Daiki recently moved in, and the three of them are all living together. Hiro is kind and takes good care of Mao, and she's fallen for him. However, during a work retreat, her friend Radical has decided she's going to confess her own feelings to Hiro, and she heads to his room.

While Hiro's gone, Mao is home alone with Daiki, who has secret feelings for her. What is he planning now?!

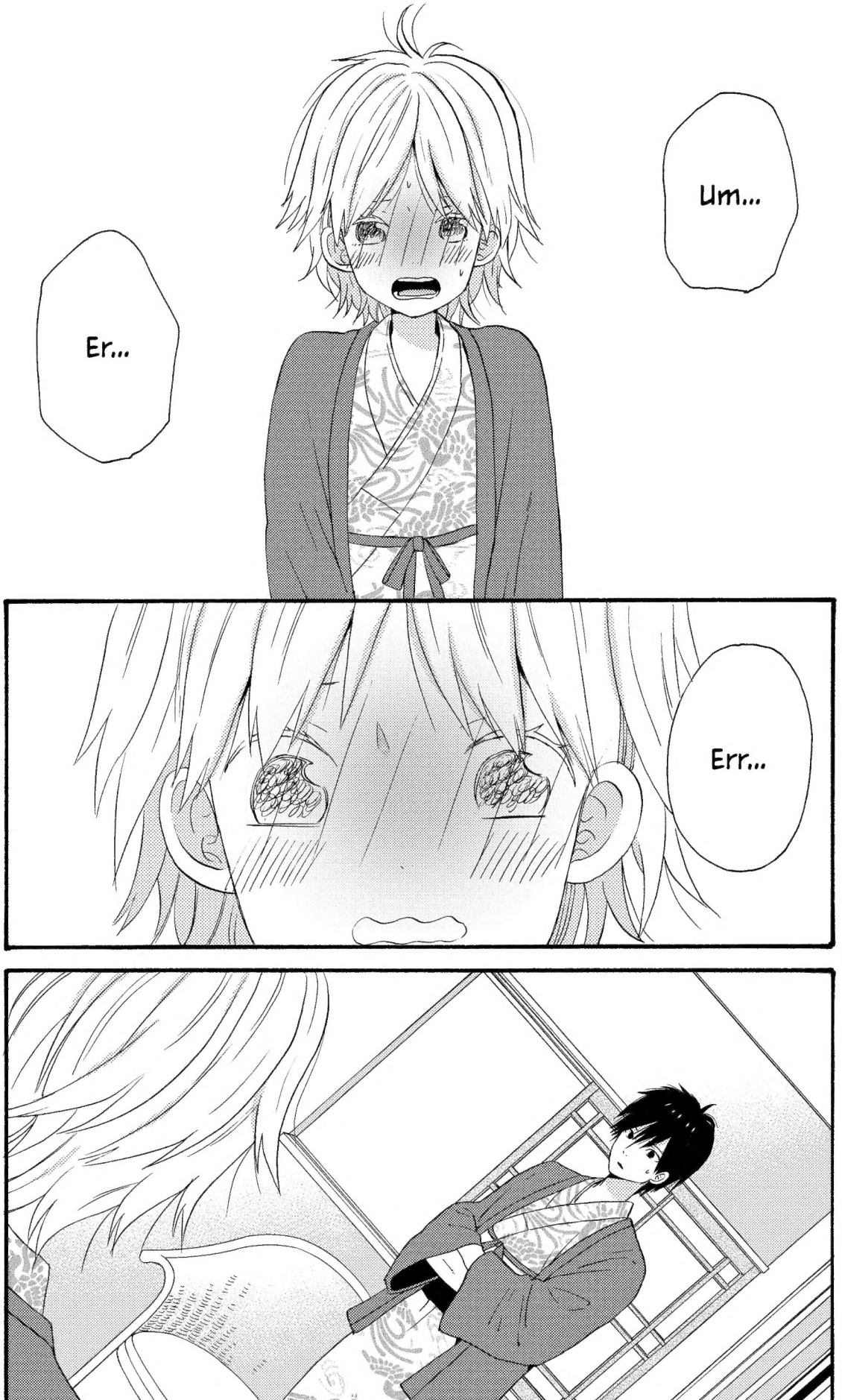
I wanted to draw a girl in a school uniform with a ponytail. So I did.

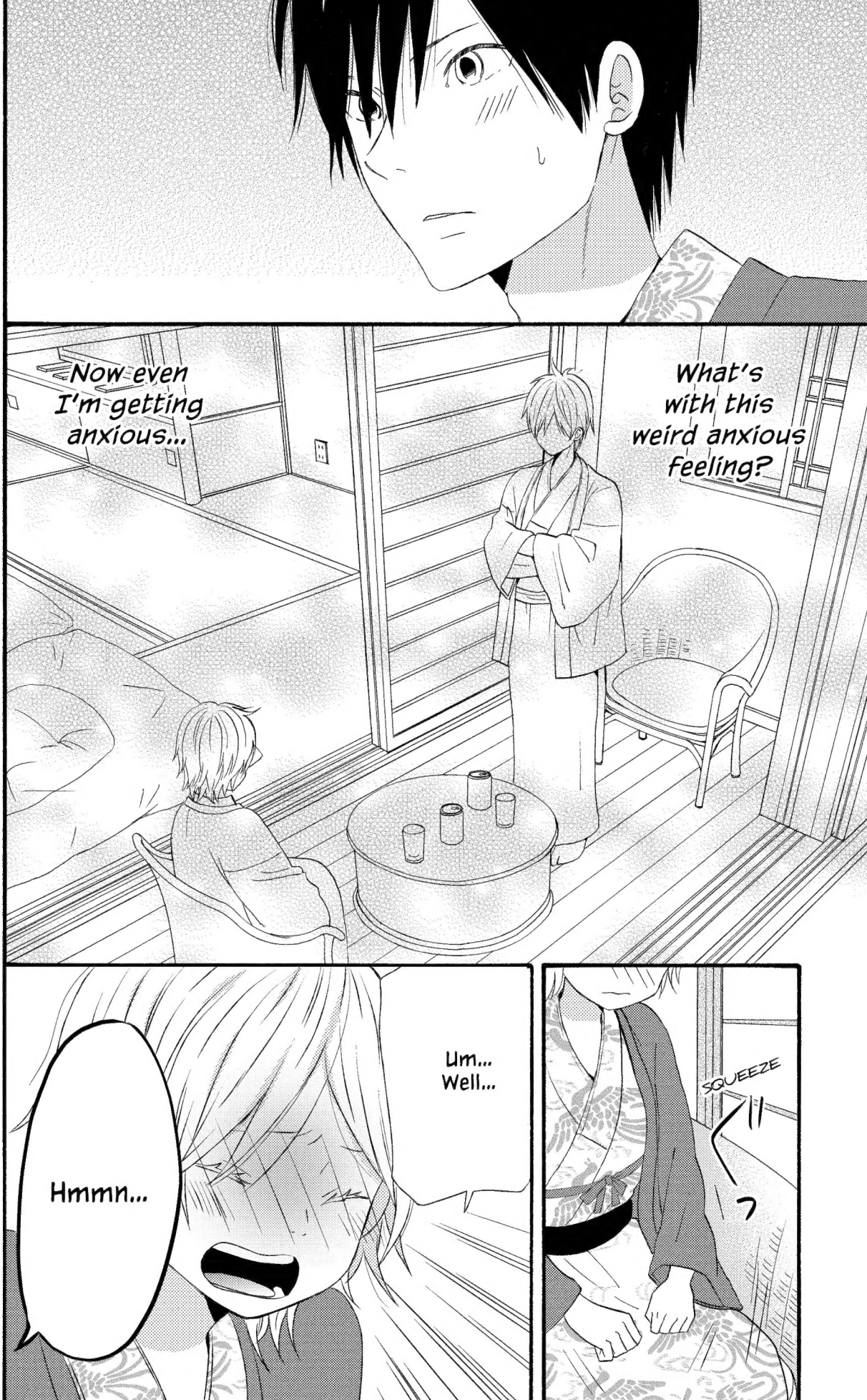
I want to make friends with a high school girl.

story 29 Another Mao

This imagined version of high school Hiro shows up in this story.

I think I'm extra good at drawing the embarrassing fantasies girls have.


Um...
Er...
Err...


What's with this weird anxious feeling?
Now even I'm getting anxious...
SQUEEZE
Um... Well...
Hmmn...

Huh? Did I... fall asleep?

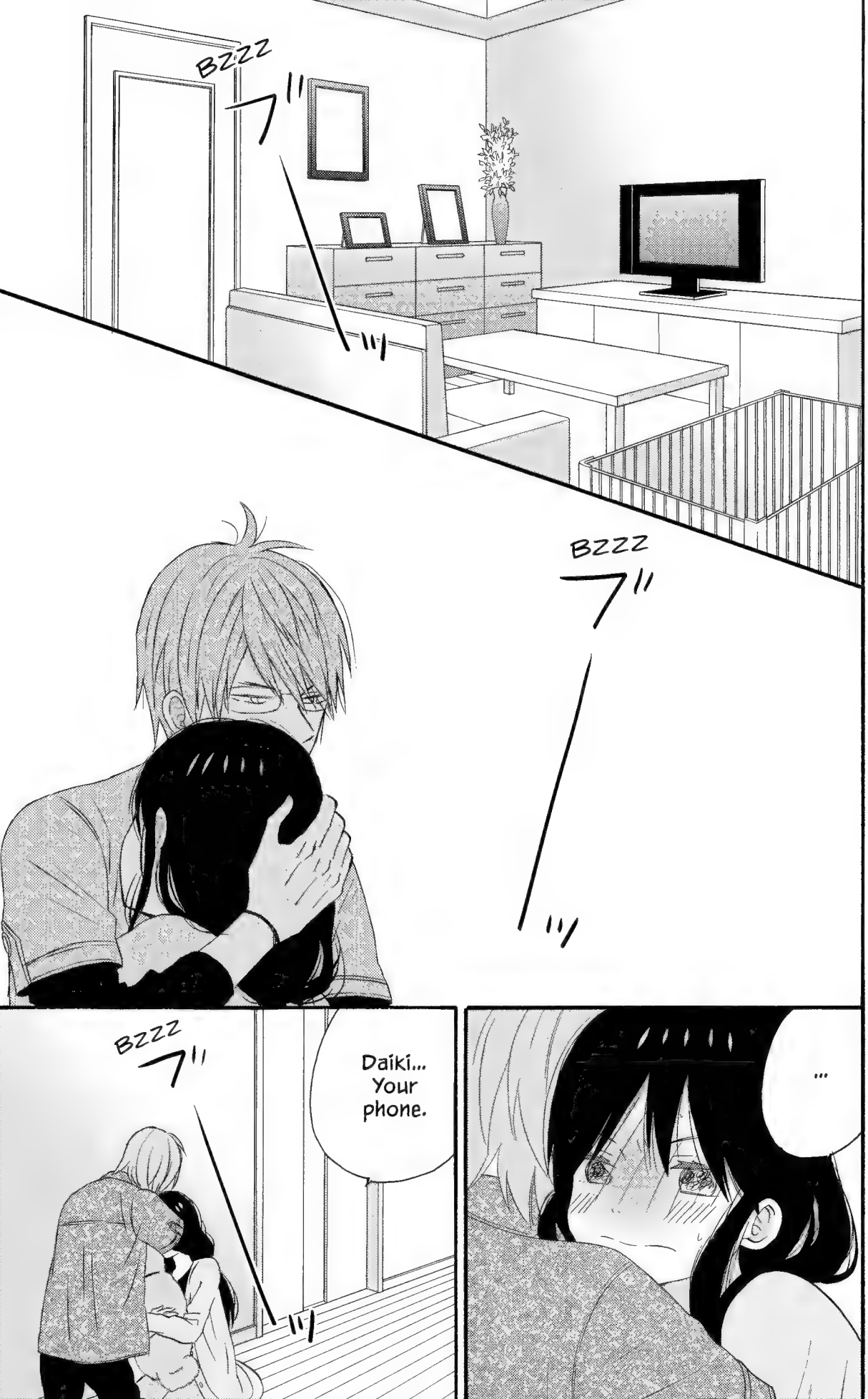
Yep, it's night!
Oh, it's still night. I was worried.

Um... I should go back to my room soon.

Um... Nakamura-san...

Morning.
Oh! Good morning!
What?! It's morning?!

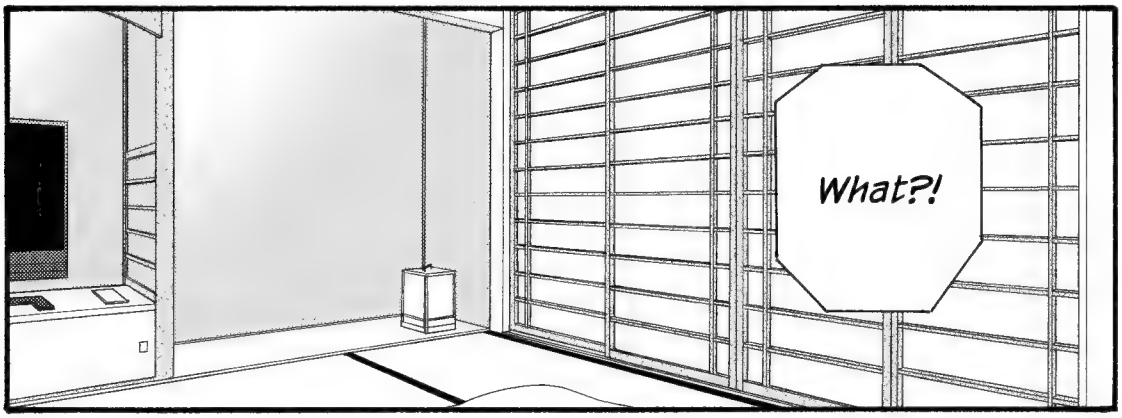
Uh...
Sure.
I'll talk to you later.
...
TMP
TMP
TMP
...
It's nothing.
Wh-what was that? What's going on?!

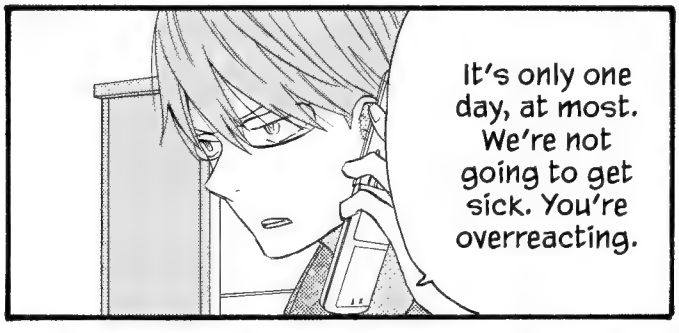

BZZZ
BZZZ
BZZZ
Daiki... Your phone.
...

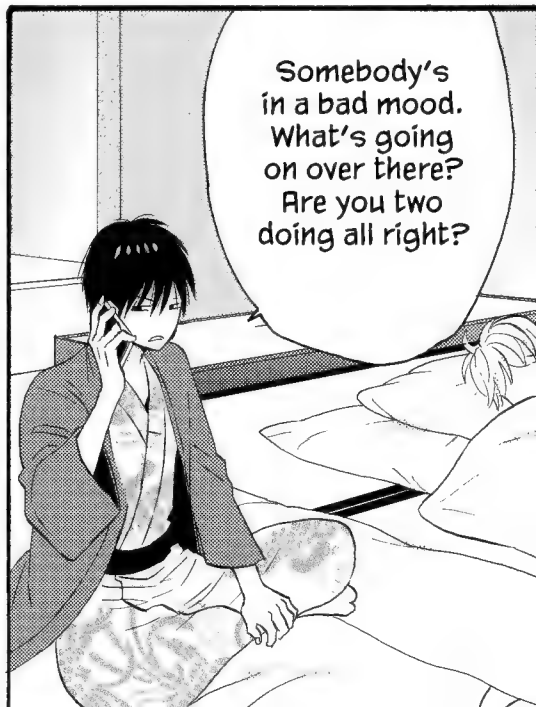
CALLING
基兄
Hiro
BZZZ

GRR
...

All right, shut up already.
FLAIL
Your phone's going off! Your phone!
FLAIL
FLAIL
FLAIL


What?!


It's only one day, at most. We're not going to get sick. You're overreacting.


Somebody's in a bad mood. What's going on over there? Are you two doing all right?

...
Sure.
Bye, then.
Oh, really?
Yeah, Mao's fine, too.

BA-DUM
ドキ
BA-DUM
ドキ
SHWIP
It's nothing.
What's wrong?
BA-DUM BA-DUM
ドキ ドキ
That's nice.
Looks like the thunder's slowed down.
I guess.

HNNGH
Jerk.
Call me, already.
He should be calling me with some annoying chatter, like, "How are you? We're having fun!"
ROLL
ROLL
ROLL
ROLL

FWIP
カリ
バーン♪
BINNG
Wh-what's with this text!
It's kinda cute, though...!
INCOMING TEXT
From Hiro
Subject No Subject
I found a weird statue.
SUBMENU
PAGE
CHOOSE
REPLY
PAGE
Hiro, you jerrrk!
How'd he know this'd make me so happy...?
FLAIL
じたばた
FLAIL
じたばた

PARCO
仙台駅 SENDAI
Thank you very much!
I think this was a great choice, Sugimoto.
Sendai was fun.
I had fun, too!

Oh? Uh, well...
I see you're working hard, Nakamura.
Yes.
You're going to see your sister now, right, Nakamura?
Oh, I'm going to Matsushima.
Sugimoto's looking at you wistfully.
Huh?
Oho...

Is this the same thing as yesterday?
Does she still want to talk to me?
...
If she's looking at me like that, then I have to...
I have to think about Hina now.
I can't.

The first time I visited her at her new home, she wasn't quite used to it.

She wasn't used to it the next time, or the next time, either.

No matter how hard I try, everything I imagine is terrible...

...but it's better than not getting to see her at all.

She's finally letting me visit.

...is because of me.

I'm wondering if the reason why Hina's not coming home...

And it's raining again.

PLIP

Then you can get closer to Hina-chan.
You should follow my lead, Hiro.

...

Oh... You shouldn't have.
Oh, this is for you. It's not much...
Thanks so much for all your help.

Hiro-kun, you came a long way, right? Take your time.
Oh, yes. But don't worry about me.

Welcome home, Cocoa. It's Hiro-kun.
Oh...
I'm home! Who's here?

It's been a while. You've sure gotten big.
You're a second-year in middle school?
Thanks.
You've gotten old, Hiro.
She's become a little bratty.

Hina, are things going okay with Cocoa-chan?

Not really.

What do you mean?
But...

...I'm still not going home with you, Hiro.
Hiro-kun brought us a cake, so you should have some.
Really? Awesome!
I see.
If you're happy here, then that's fine.

I'll move out on my own.
But you can't rely on the kindness of our uncle and aunt forever.
You don't have to worry about me.
I'll live on my own somewhere nearby.
...Mao.
What is this...? She sounds just like...

You can go home.
I'm fine.
TMP
Hina...
See you later, alligator.
Nopers.
Hina?
Hey! Hiro-kun, you want cake, too, right?

She started making bad jokes like that when I told her she was a bummer.
What a lame joke.
Is Hina doing all right here?
Not at all.
She always eats her dinner alone.
They walk around on eggshells with her.
She basically doesn't talk to Mom and Dad, too.
But she won't go home.
Yeah.
I think she should just relax already.
Hmm.

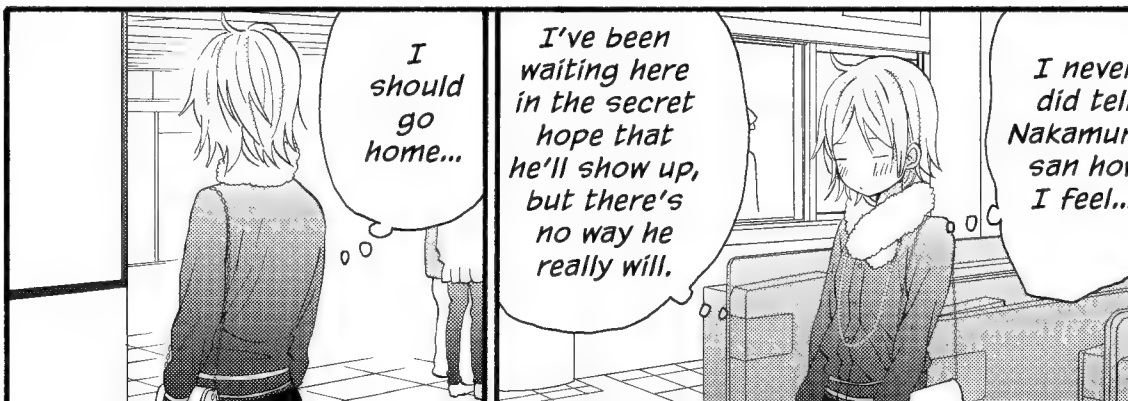
If she's really that miserable...
PLIP
PLIP
...then she should just come home already.
But I guess she really hates me that much.
It doesn't really matter if she hates me, though. I'll come back as many times as I need for things to get back to the way they used to be.
What's the point if I'm just going to lose my nerve?
I'll move out on my own.
She always eats her dinner alone.
Have I been...

Was I trying to save...
...a simulated version of Hina?
And trying to save myself through it, too?
...conflating Mao and Hina with each other?
In that case, I'm just disgusting.

*White tickets only past this point
新幹線のりかえ口
SHINKANSEN TRANSFER ENTRANCE

はあ
SIGH
...

Yeah, this is a cute Ma-kun.
This one, too.
SMIRK
SMIRK

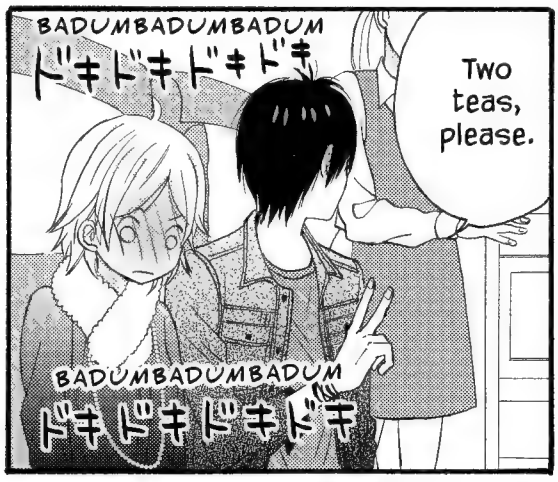

I should go home...
I've been waiting here in the secret hope that he'll show up, but there's no way he really will.
I never did tell Nakamura-san how I feel...

Oh, a message from Ruirui-san.
What're you doing?
Hey, Ruirui-san! I was going to tell my crush I like him, but I got too nervous and couldn't do it.
lololololol
Ruirui laughed at me?! Why?!
Sugimoto, your romance talk is so funny. It makes me feel like a middle schooler's askin me.
DUNNNN
A middle schooler?!
Then what's an adult relation-ship like?
But I guess no matter how old you get, there are times you get feelings like that. I guess he really must be that great a guy. Good luck, Sugimoto.

...
I'll just...
...wait a little more.
Just a bit longer.

...
Sugimoto-san.
Huh?!
N-Naka-mura-san.
What a coincidence. You headed home?
Y-yeah!

VRMMM
...
...


BADUMBADUMBADUM
ドキドキドキドキ
Two teas, please.
BADUMBADUMBADUM
ドキドキドキドキ

Oh, do you want a drink?
I-I'm fine!

Here.
...the same as before.
Oh! Th-thanks!
I didn't just imagine it.

This is...

She was waiting for me!
Wasn't she?!
Did she want to talk to me about liking me or hating me or something like that?!
U-um!
Yes?
Uh...
Er...
ドキドキ
BADUM BADUM
Um...
BADUM BADUM
ドキドキ
Uhh...
Huh?!
How was your sister?!

I guess she hates me.
Oh, really? I see.
Well, sometimes middle schoolers are just like that!
True.
VRMMM
...

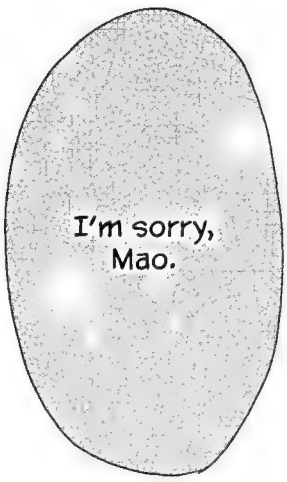
Was it really nothing?
Was it all just my creepy misunder-standing...?
Good night!
I'm sorry, Sugimoto-san.
I will sincerely reflect on my poor thoughts.
...
I'm tired.
Time to go home.

WOOF
わん
WOOF
わん
WOOF
わん
WOOF
わん
WOOF
わん
Hiro! Welcome home!
I'm home.
I was about to take Croquette on a walk.
Daiki's at work.
Oh, yeah? I'll go.
It's gotten cold. Head inside.
Oh?
Then let's go—

THWUP
To-gether.
Hey, c'mon. I can't see.
Looks good on you.
I can...
Can you?
...always tell, Hiro.
When something bad's happened.

You sure know me well, Mao.

You're just easy to read.


I'm sorry, Mao.

Maybe.
...

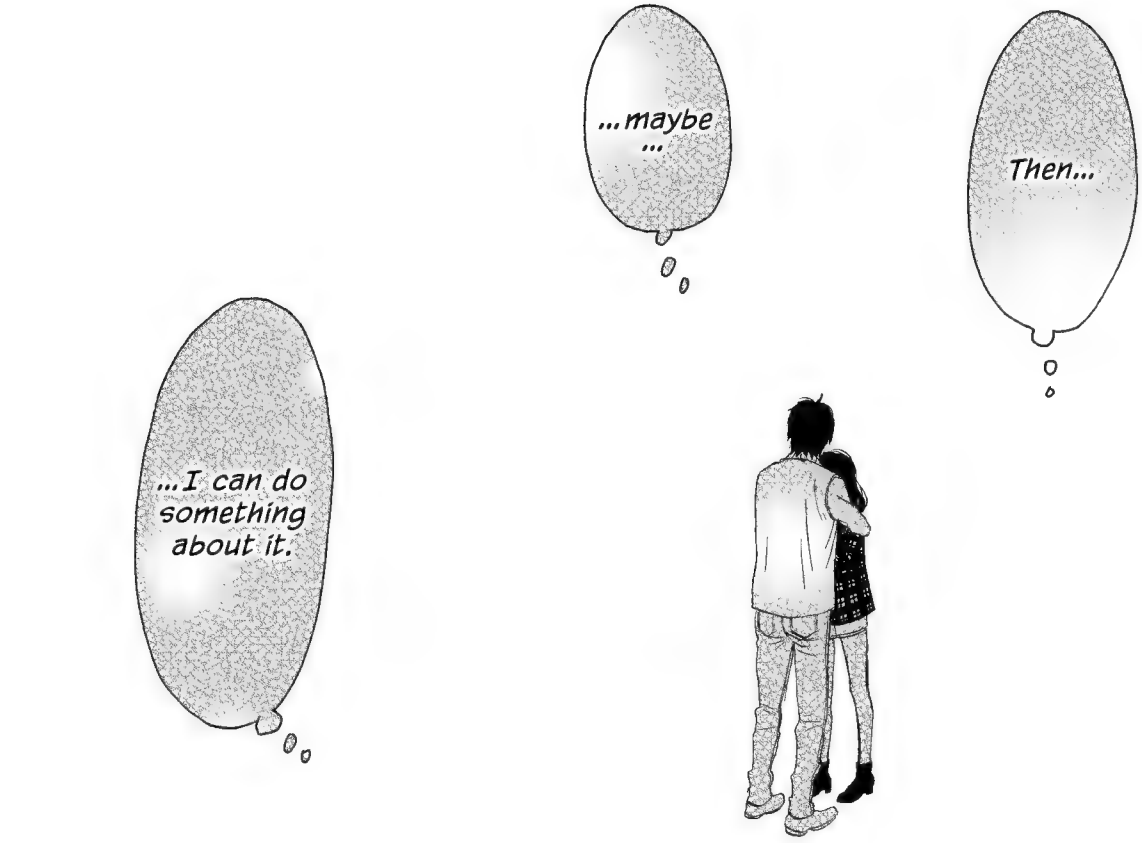
Just thinking about you crying and telling me not to feel bad for you...

Why are you apologizing?
?

...and how sometimes I saw you as a substitute for Hina.
Okay, but...
...you've been so much help to me, Hiro.
It's weird that you'd apologize for that.

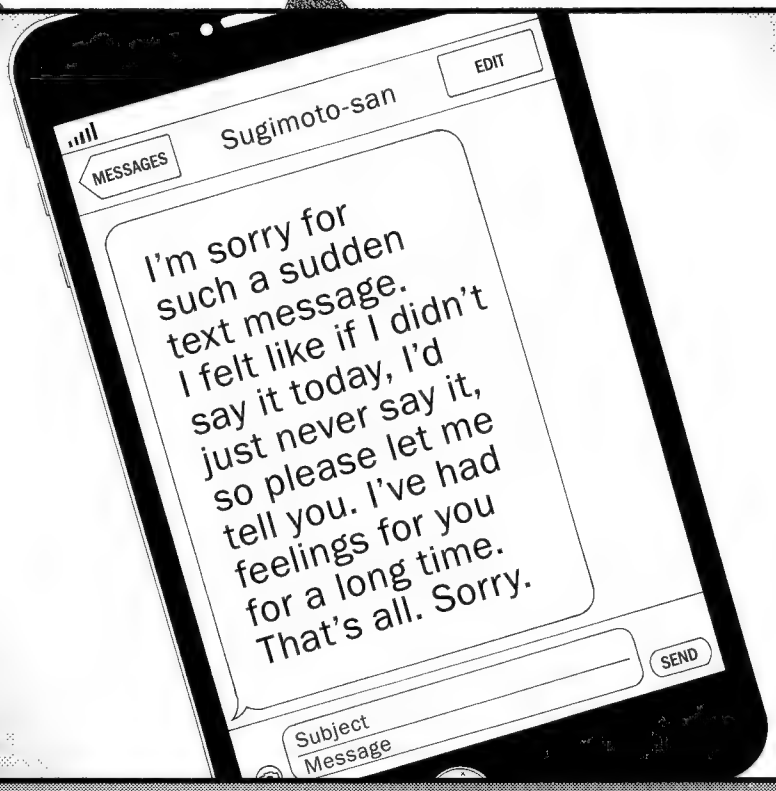
Ow!
ゴイン
THONK
NYEH HEH HEH.
...
It's different now, though.
Completely different.

Things aren't going well...
...at Hina's new place, right?
Just like it was with me.
Isn't that right?
...
HUG
ギュー
You're too close!
UGHHH...


...maybe ...
Then...
...I can do something about it.

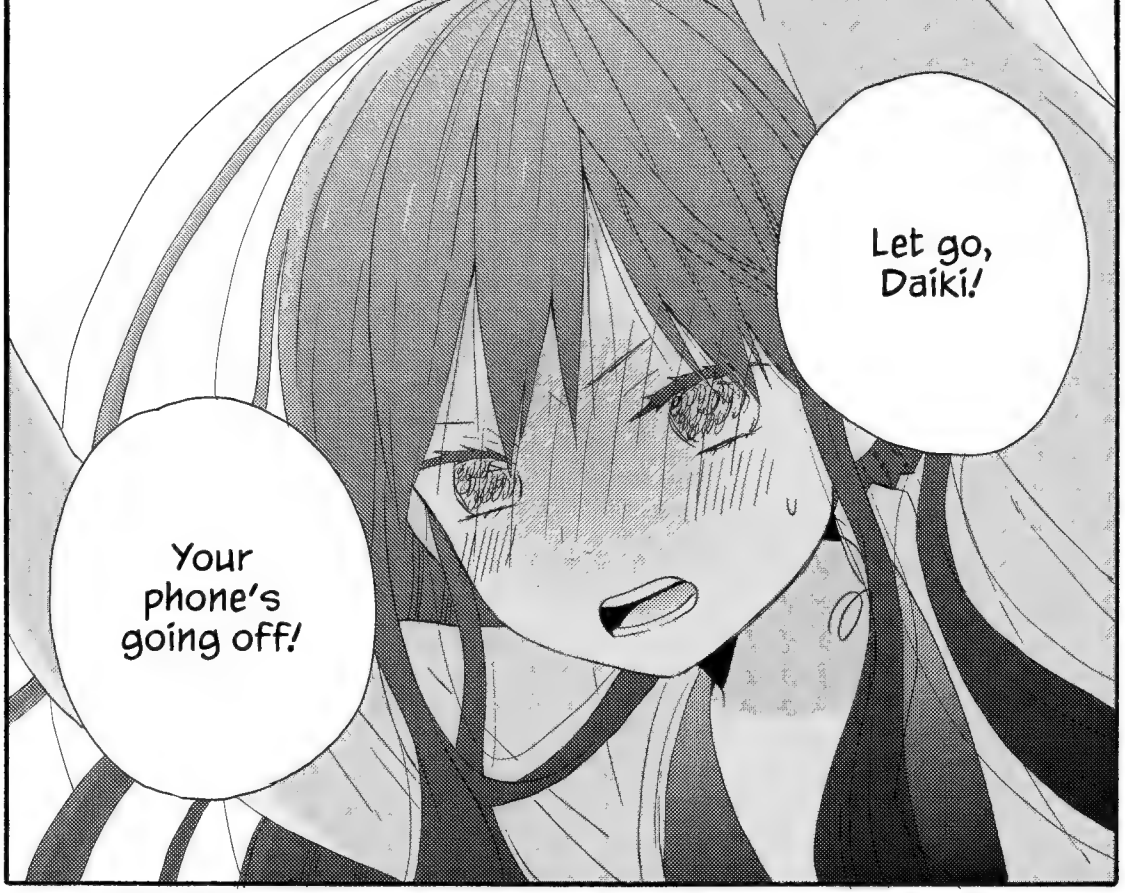
Oh, right, Mao.
What did Daiki do while I was away?
Huh?! What d'you mean, what'd he do?!
This is a totally normal question.

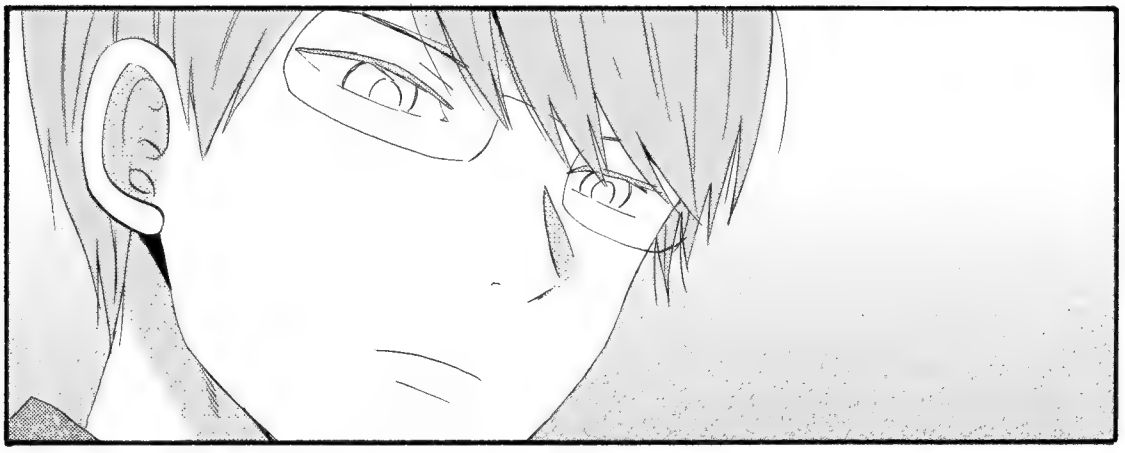
What is it?
...
First I've heard of it.
He told me he was afraid of thunder.
H-Hiro, your phone's going off!
BZZZ
Oh? Maybe Daiki?
BZZZ
That bastard.
I'm gonna question him when he gets home.


EDIT
Sugimoto-san
MESSAGES
I'm sorry for such a sudden text message. I felt like if I didn't say it today, I'd just never say it, so please let me tell you. I've had feelings for you for a long time. That's all. Sorry.
SEND
Subject
Message

story 30

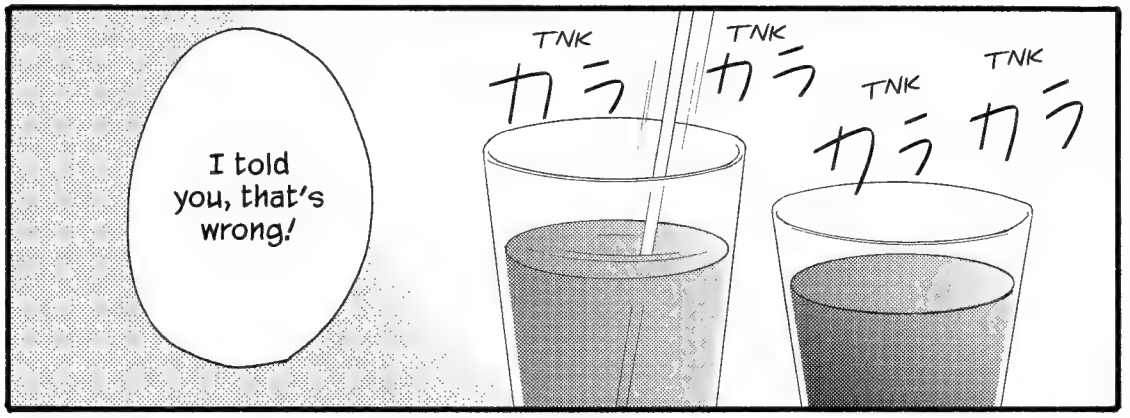
Before the Trip


Let go, Daiki!
Your phone's going off!



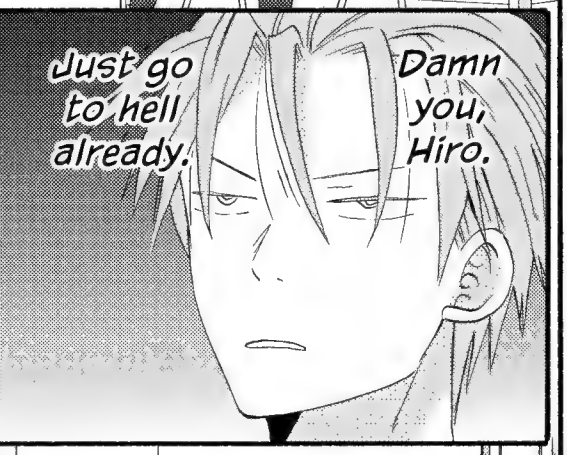
Hiro?
...
CALLING HIRO
FSHHH
All right.
Shut up.

Oh, really?
Was that a call from Hiro?
What do you think he's doing right now?
Aaah, jeeez.


I told you, that's wrong!
TNK カラ
TNK カラ
TNK カラ
TNK カラ

I know you're trying, but you're not making any headway at all!
Sorry ...
That's inventory! I told you to use the ones out here first!

How many times have you told me you're trying, anyway?
Sorry.
It doesn't mean anything if you're just saying it and not doing it. You have to actually make progress.
Don't you feel pathetic?
I'm sorry, Nakamura-san.
What for? Maybe he's just not teaching you right.
No matter what I try.
No, he's right. It's always like this with me.
Even when there's a girl I like, she never notices, no matter how hard I try.
It's really pathetic.
Okay! That's enough of that talk!
Hm?
I think you're going a little too far with him.
I can take over from here.



Trying hard?

Well, yeah. I guess you could say I'm trying.

Making no progress?

Aah... Yeah.

I'm probably not making any progress.

CLACK

Hiro came. He's gone now, but he seems good. That's nice.

Doesn't seem like she really wants to come home.

...irritatingly depressed about this whole thing.

...he's gotta be...

And when it comes to Hiro...

...
MESSAGES
Sugimoto-san
EDIT
I'm sorry for such a sudden text message. I felt like if I didn't say it today, I'd just never say it, so please let me tell you. I've had feelings for you for a long time. That's all. Sorry.

!
BZZZ
Sugimoto-san
MESSAGES
EDIT
Thanks for the text. I'd like to have a serious talk with you about this.
Hina
Hina, I'm on my way.
Thanks for coming today, Hiro. I'm glad you seem well.
ボスッ
FWUMP
Hina...

Welcome home, Daiki.
I'm home.
WHINE
CREAK
WHINE
I've been through a lot today.
Pathe-tic?
What's with that pathetic face?
Aah... She says she doesn't want to come home.
How'd it go with Hina?

I was hoping she could transfer to high school here, if at all possible.
Well, if things are going well for her over there, there's no need to drag her all the way back here.

Going well...?
If they were, that'd be great.

We don't know if she'd do well if she came back here, though.
Why don't you raise your blood sugar and think about it?
I bought these on my way home.

You don't need to put the whole world on your shoulders all the time.
Damn it, what am I doing?
Go to hell.
It's almost like I'm trying to cheer him up.
Thanks, Daiki.
You bought all my favorite snacks.
Did I? I didn't even realize.
Oh, right...
While I was gone, what did you and Mao—

Yup, I'm home.
Mao, Daiki bought a bunch of snacks for us.
Ooh! I'm only going to eat the non-sugary ones!
Oh, it's Daiki.
Welcome home.

Sure, but what are you scheming?
WHISPER
WHISPER
Can you give me Hina-chan's number later?
Daiki...
TUG
TUG

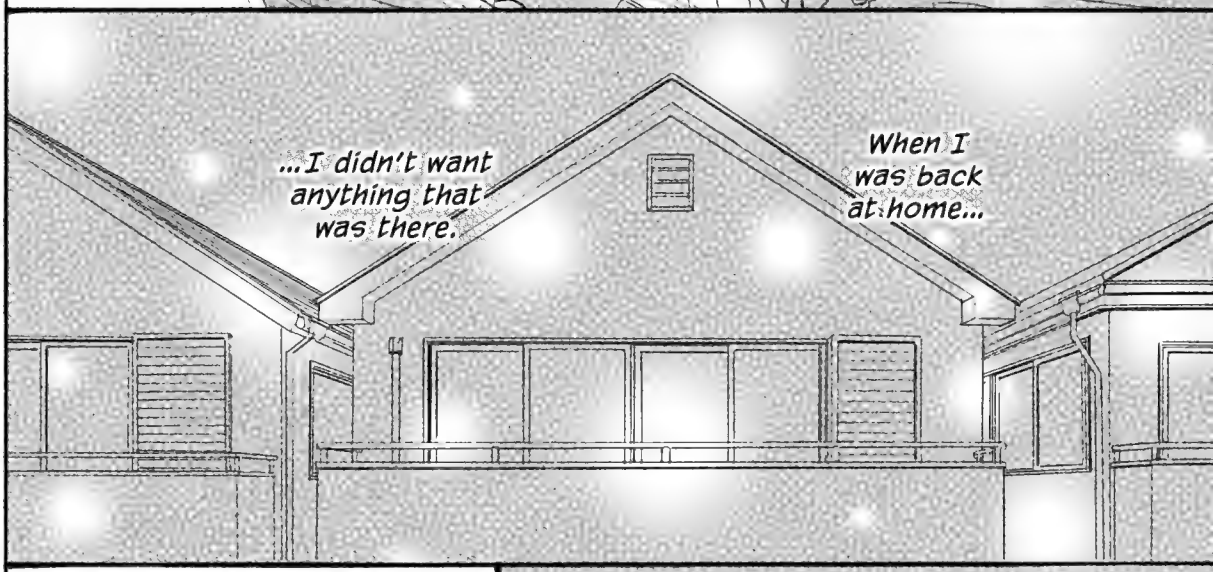
Hmph.
I'm not scheming!
That darn shrimp.
She just wants it so she can do something for Hiro.
And she smells so good just out of the bath, damn it.
All right!
Well, bye, you two!
I'm off to bed.
What's Mao scheming now?
Who knows?
Good night.
Night!
You and Mao are pretty similar.
You're always thinking about other people.

That's not true at all.
Aren't you the same way?
But...
You don't want to make her feel uncomfortable, do you?
She still doesn't have anywhere else to go.
...don't do weird stuff to Mao.

Well, sorry to disappoint you...
...but everything's fine.
I'm not going that far.
You trying to say I did something while you were gone?
First I'll say it's been a while.
I have to make sure we still get along, at first.
TAKKA カチ
TAKKA カチ
TAKKA カチ

When I was back at home...

...I didn't want anything that was there.

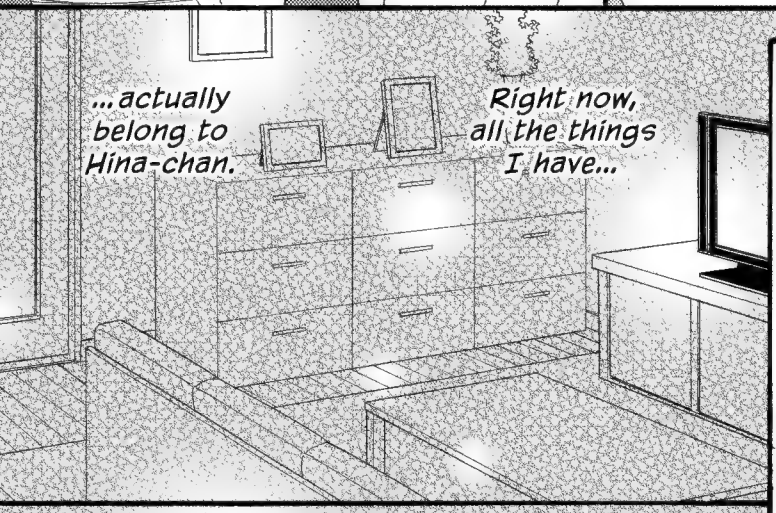


So I had nothing, nowhere I belonged.

I just waited and wasted time.

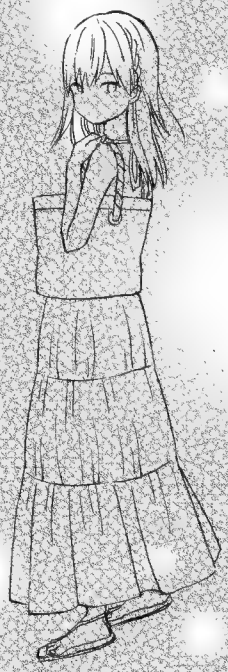
That's why I started writing that story online. I was running from reality.

Thinking about it now, I really had nowhere else to run.



In this house, I have everything I ever wanted. So many things.

So, please, come home soon.



Then, I think...

...I can make more progress, too.

This is wrong, I shouldn't be crying.

Hiro said it himself...

"You're not a substitute for Hina-chan anymore."

I was happy.

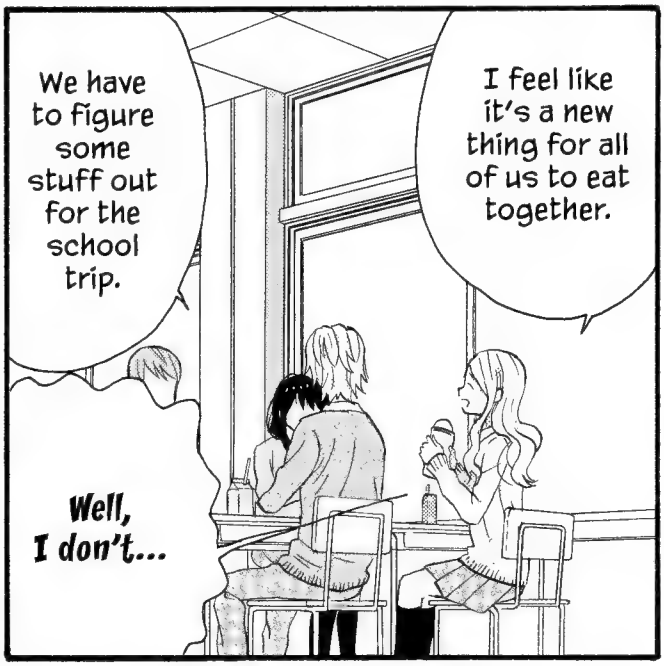
But if I'm really not a replacement for Hina...

...then I guess feeling like I belong here is just an illusion.

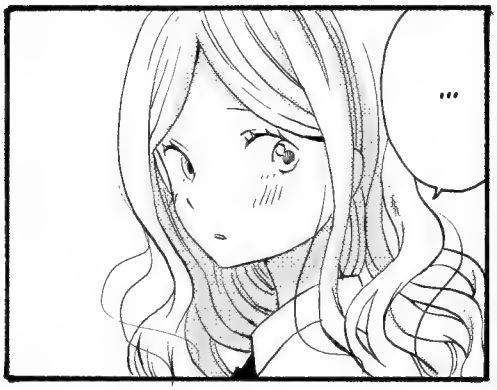
Since when did I have so many people waiting for me to come home?

Let's eat!

Then I could go around with Mao!
I wish I was in you guys' class!
More like Oda.
And Oda-kun.

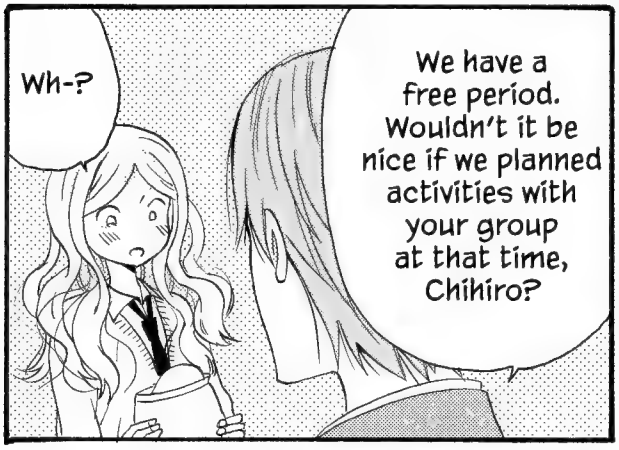

We have to figure some stuff out for the school trip.
I feel like it's a new thing for all of us to eat together.
Well, I don't...

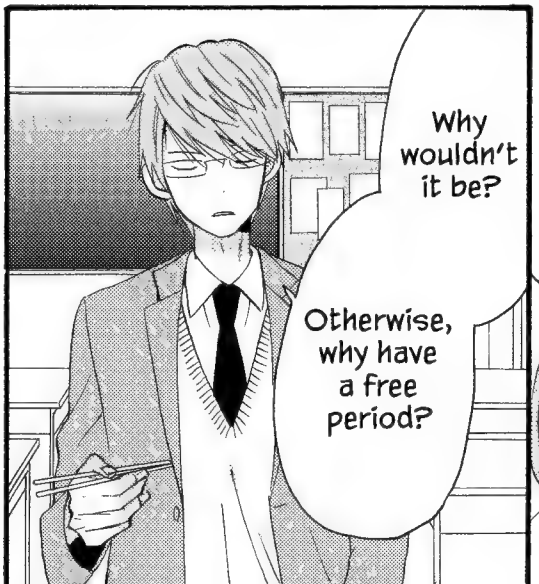
Let me know if there's anything you want.
Got it.
Well, let's think about what we can schedule in and make our plan from there.



I want to go to the Uzumasa Studio Park! Other than that, I don't care!
I want to eat Komon Monaka*!
Komon Monaka? What is that? It sounds creepy.

Note: *Komon Monaka* is a Kyoto specialty snack food.





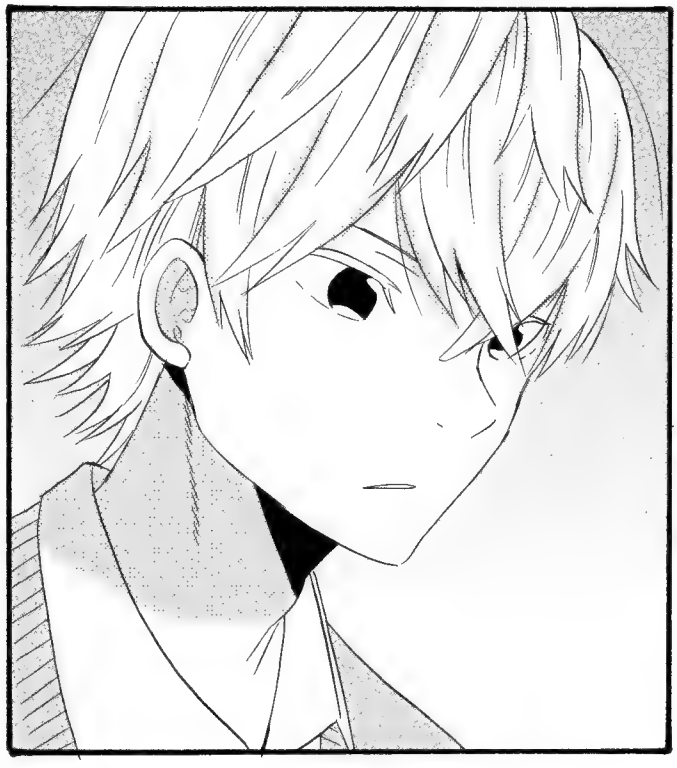
I'm pretty good at getting things done.
Nice one, Daiki!
Hearing you say it ticks me off, though!
Thanks, Daiki-kun.
I'll ask everyone.
...Actually, I've been worried about something for a while.
Mao and Daiki-kun...
...it might be trouble for you two to eat together.
Your lunches are the same.

Oh, yeah...
Wh-Oda-kun, you just noticed?
Yup.
Cute.
キュン♡
TWINGE
We could just tell everyone we're dating.
Whaaaa?!
We tell them that at work. It makes things easier.
Hmmm.
What?
No, I was just thinking, since Motomiya has a crush already, isn't it actually a more of a pain in the ass?

Besides, why do the two of you have the same lunch, anyway?
Wh-why start there?!
Daiki has a crush, too. It would be a pain for him, too!
Well, yeah. I feel like it would.
I live with my siblings, but we still have different lunches.
Mom makes lunch for my little sister, but not for me. And my big sister goes to the cafeteria.
Because they live together?
H-hey!
Oh, so that's why you eat bread every day.

Huh?

M-maybe I can bring you a lunch?
I'm pretty good at cooking, and if I get up early, I can make you lunch, too.



Sorry, Chihiro.
No, don't apologize!
I'm sorry.
No, it's fine.
I probably couldn't wake up early, anyway.
Right?
What's with that sad face?
Don't change your mind later, all right?

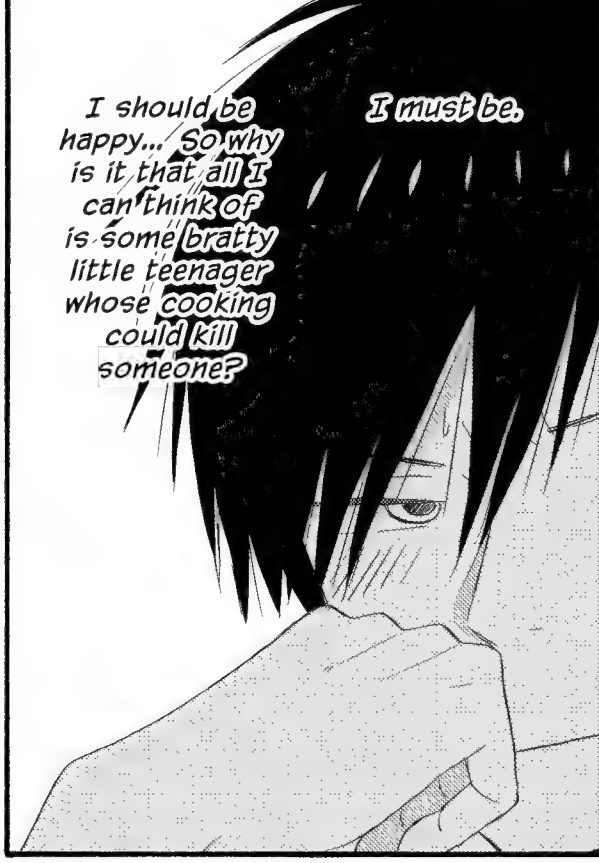
TAKKA TAKKA
カタカタ
カタ カタ
TAKKA TAKKA

Good morning.

Um, I'd like to speak to you about the text you sent yesterday...
TMP
TMP
TMP
Sorry, I have somewhere to be!

Hey, Nakamura. Don't be mean to Sugimoto-san!
She ran away.
I wasn't!
I guess this means she's avoiding me.
TAKKA
TAKKA
But I really want to talk it out with her.
Any guy would be happy.
How could a girl that cute be into me?
Hiro, you idiot!
If she was really serious with that text...
...then I guess I'm happy.

I mean, she's incredibly cute!
Just looking at her gives you this peaceful feeling!
And I acted like a jerk when she started working here!


I must be.
I should be happy... So why is it that all I can think of is some bratty little teenager whose cooking could kill someone?

And she's just a good person.

And Mao...

...I can't say anything to her until she moves back home. I know that.
But I have to...
Sugimoto-san.
...give her a serious answer as soon as possible.
カタッ
TMP
Please, wait!
トニコ
TMP
はっ
GASP

...
SHF
Please just answer me by text!
I'm really sorry! Really!
...no matter what you say, I'm going to be pathetic and cry.
...I know...
Because...

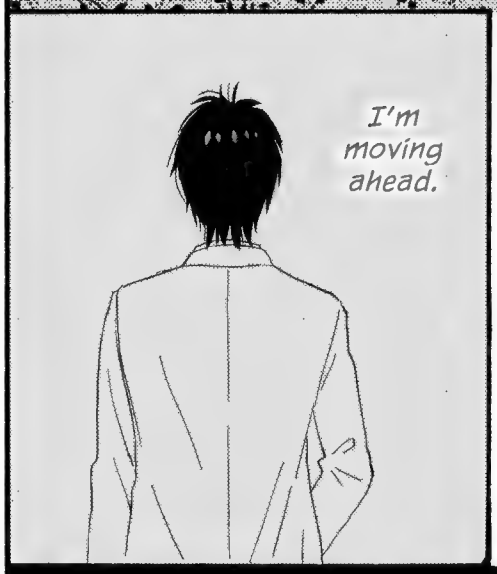
Welcome home.
BARK
I'm home.
Why?! So mean!
Aah, dumb old Mao.
So lame.
I'm getting ready for my trip!
What a mess.
Getting ready makes this kind of mess?
That actually takes a bit of skill.
FWUMPH
Welcome home.

You look tired, Hiro.
Did something happen at work?
What? I do?
Hmm.
Well, whatever.
You were here and you let it get this messy, Daiki?
She's out of my jurisdiction.
Is it that woman?
I've been worried about it all this time.
Mao has, too.
Daiki!

But when Hiro was gone, all you could talk about was what you'd do if that lady confessed her feelings to Hiro. It was really irritating.
Aaaah! Stop talking crazy!
...
...what I want more than anything else is for you to be happy, Hiro.
I understand, okay?
Uhh... About that...

Don't you think you should do something for yourself for once?
You're always thinking about other people, Hiro. You never make a choice.
What do you want to do?
I am doing things for myself.

...
I'm moving ahead.
TWEET
TWEET
TWEET

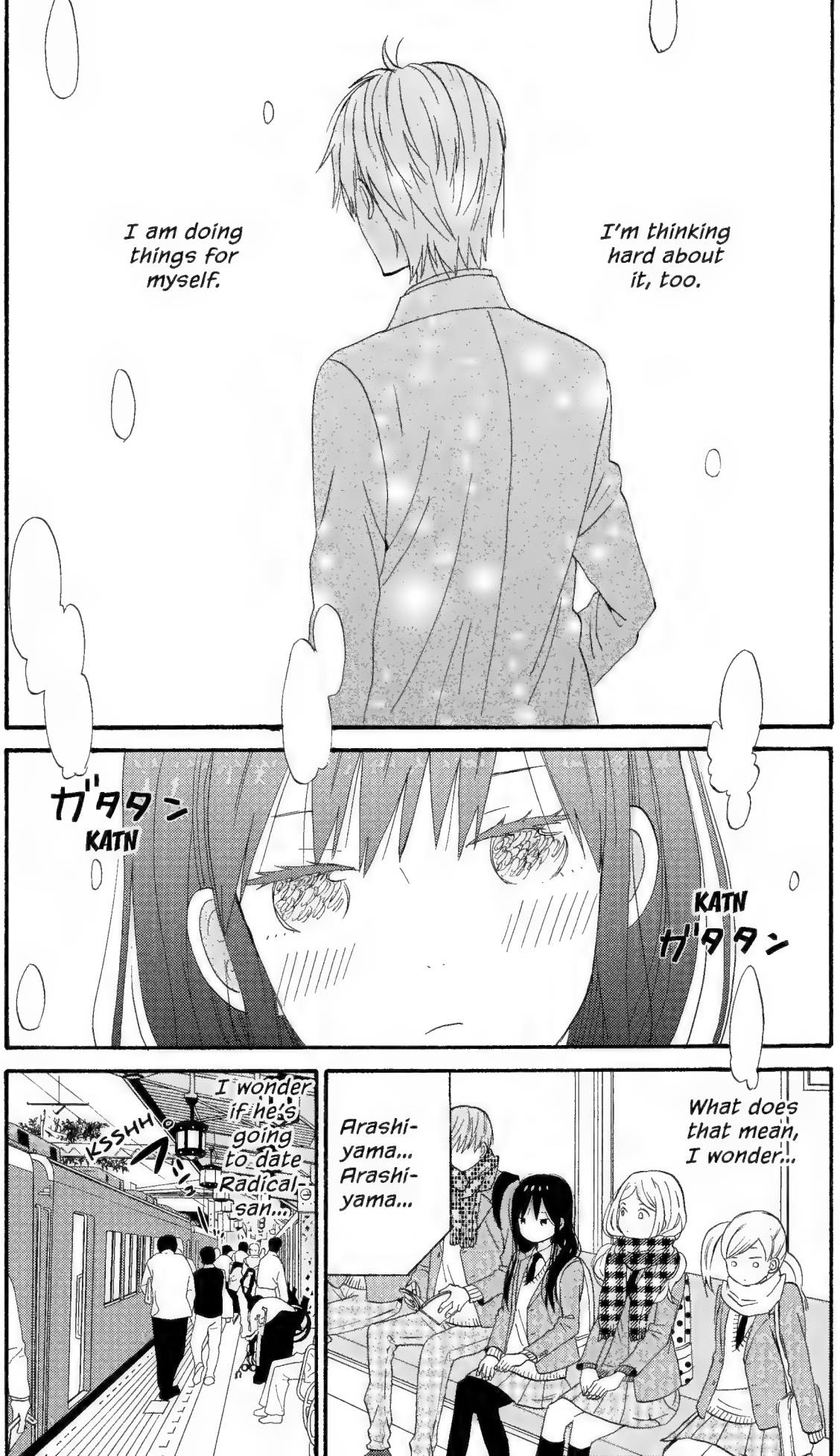

I'm moving ahead.

I'm just going on a trip, but I couldn't sleep at all.
FSH
むくり
Weird.

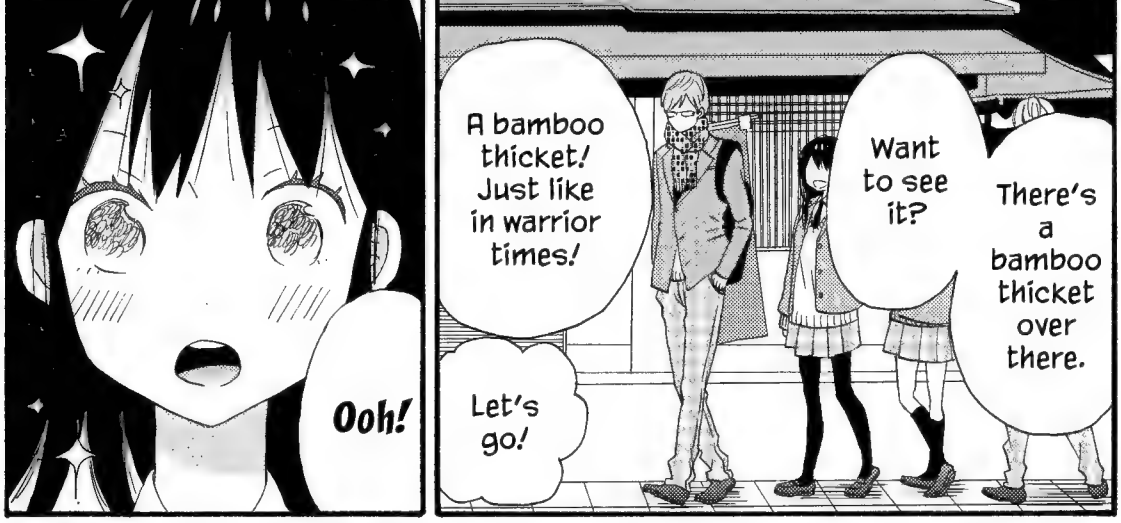
But to where?

story 31

School Trip


I am doing things for myself.
I'm thinking hard about it, too.
ガタタン
KATN
KATN
ガタタン
KSSHH
I wonder if he's going to date Radical-san...
Arashi-yama... Arashi-yama...
What does that mean, I wonder...

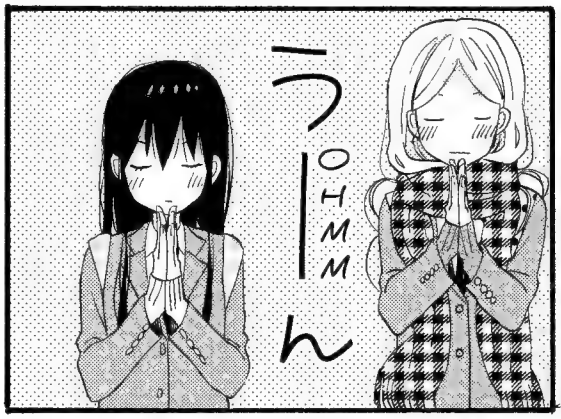
Please give me some time...
...to confess everything to him.
Mao! You seem down. Are you worried about Hiro again?
I understand how you feel, but objectively, it's such a small issue.
Chi-chan, you're so strong.
Me? No way.
So many people!
Ah, look over there!

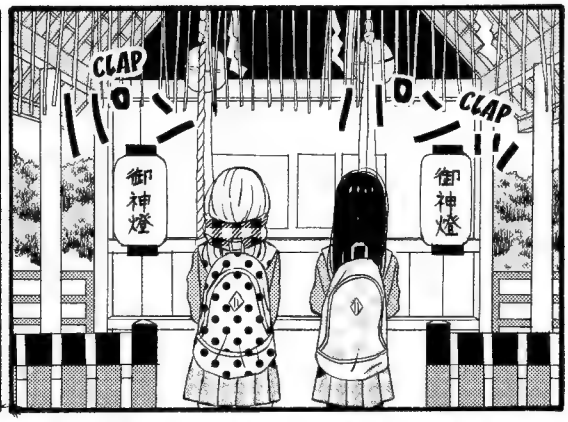

There's a bamboo thicket over there.
Want to see it?
A bamboo thicket! Just like in warrior times!
Let's go!
Ooh!

It's beautiful.

What about you? How's it going with Oda?
Nice one, Daiki-kun. You cheered Mao up!
That's not what I was after.
Amazing.
A bunch of other girls totally dragged him away.
Aah...
Yep. I'm trying my best.
You're still trying, though?

*Prayers for Graduations
*Love Prayers





*Shrine lantern

If possible...
...I'd like to be the one who makes Hiro happy.
I wish...
...that Hiro could be happy.
What if he introduces her as his girlfriend?
...and Hiro is already dating Radical-san?
But what if I go home...

What are you wishing for, Chi-chan?
Please bless me!
I want to flirt and make out!
Ughh... I don't want to think about it.
Uuuh, I...
More or less.
Did you pay your respects, Daiki? Oda-kun?
How's your sister? The really amazing one.
She's so great that I don't even want to think about it.
My older sister and my younger sister are fighting. I prayed that they'd make up soon.
...

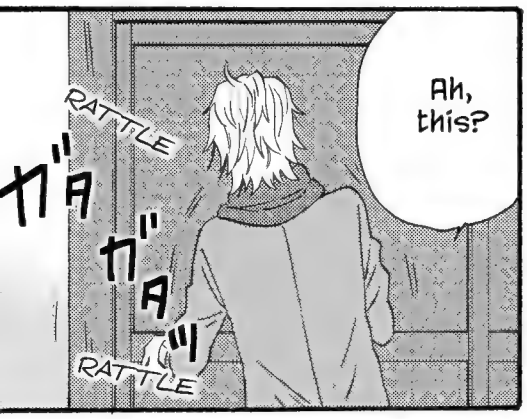
I was just wondering if Oda-kun made...
...any wishes about love, is all.
What's wrong, Chi-chan?!
...
*Toei Uzumasa Studio Park
*The Travels of Mito Komon Hall
水戸黄門漫遊の館
Oooooh!

This is holy land, Daiki! Look, his pill box!
It's a replica, isn't it? Calm down.
Ooh, signatures!
This is crazy...
Do people think this is fun?
Sorry, everyone. Mao will probably be here for a while, so you can go on ahead.
Okay, let's do that.
Sure.
Huh? Y-yeah.
Well, I'll stick around.
You, too, right, Chihiro?
...
...
You don't have to if you don't want to.
You're not interested, right?

O-O-Oda-kun!
You wanna go there?
There's a Ninja Mystery House!
Ninja?
I guess you have to solve the mysteries to move forward in the house. It sounds fun.
...
If you think it's dumb, that's okay...
I never said it was dumb.

Oh.
Okay.
It sounds fun. Let's go check it out.

Chi-chan!
Do your best!


RATTLE
ガタガタ
RATTLE
Ah, this?

Mmm. Looks wrong.

How do we get past this...?
Hmmm.
There's got to be a trick to open it up somewhere.

...
...
THONK
This?
IDIOT? YOU'RE THE IDIOT! BE MORE CAREFUL!
PAY ATTENTION, IDIOT!
That hurt!!
...
...
That's just 'cause you've been holding back all this time.
That felt kind of like old times.

I'm glad we can still be friends, anyway.
Well, what was I supposed to do?
...
I don't want to lose you as a friend, either, Chihiro.
Though I guess it was my fault we stopped talking as much from the start.
...

I didn't know...
...he felt like that about me.
How do I put this...?
I feel like I don't have to...put up a front when you're here.
I rushed too much.
Friends... I guess it would be weird to make him lunch in that case.
Thank you.
Oh, stop...

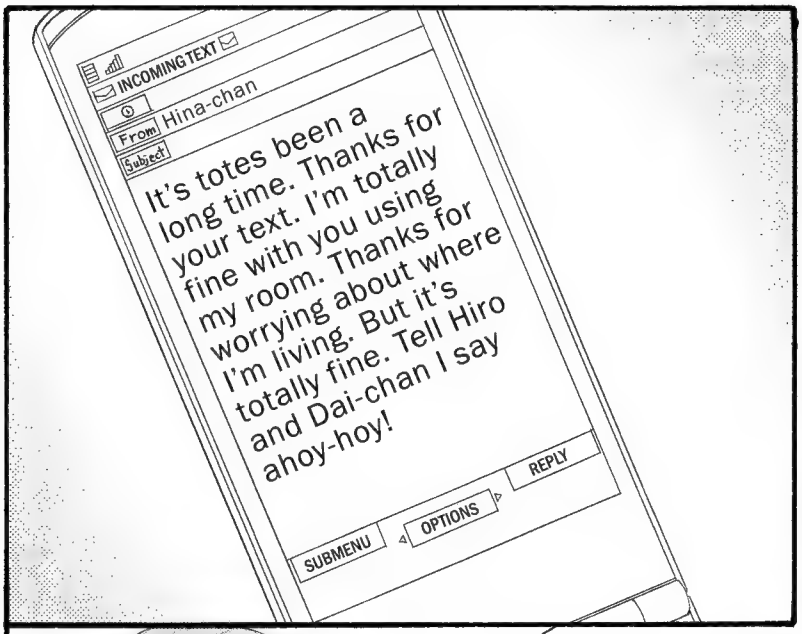
But still, I'm happy.
I dunno why.
Whoa.
ガーン
TNK
Opened it!
Wow! I would never have figured it out!
This is a pretty fun place.
Yeah! Mao would like it.
She totally would!
But now you look like you're not having fun.
I just told you I am!
But it's more fun because I'm here with Oda-kun.

...
I had so much fun with you at the fireworks festival, too.
Do you think we could maybe go again?
Oh-
Did I say too much?

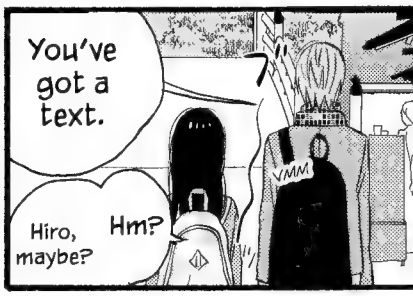
Lots of people tell me they like me...
...but after I turn them down, that's it.
But you're really acting like nothing's changed.
I guess it's no surprise that I was avoiding you...

You're a strange one, Chihiro.
Let's do it again.
Wh-
Let's go.

This one's for Hiro...
This one's for Hina-chan...
And this one's for my family.


INCOMING TEXT
From Hina-chan
Subject
It's totes been a long time. Thanks for your text. I'm totally fine with you using my room. Thanks for worrying about where I'm living. But it's totally fine. Tell Hiro and Dai-chan I say ahoy-hoy!
REPLY
OPTIONS
SUBMENU

Wow! They're gonna love these gifts!
Amazing choices.


You've got a text.
Hm?
Hiro, maybe?

Ah-haaah...
I knew you'd texted Hina.

What are you scheming?
Hey, don't read over people's shoulders! That's a bad habit!
It was obvious.
N-nothing, jeez.
I don't know if I'll come up with a plan to try to get Hina-chan to come home...
...but I had to do what I could, that's all.
Oh? For Hiro?
...

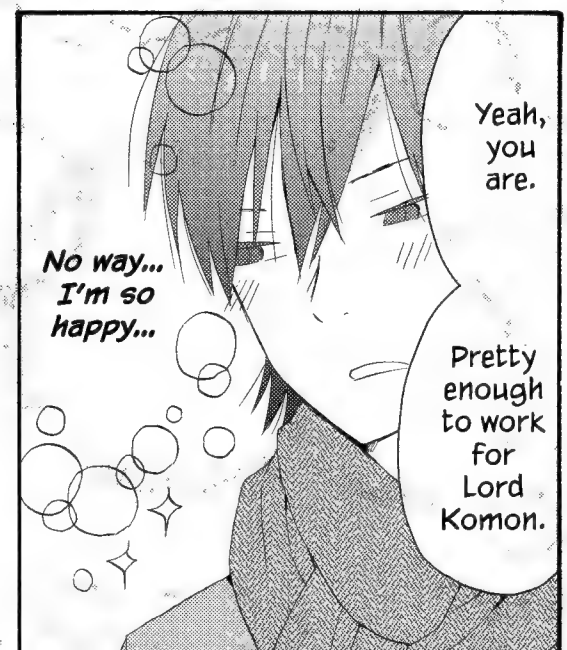
Girl I like in Kobe?
What about you, Daiki? Why don't you text that girl you like in Kobe?
Tell her to come over.
I have to eat *Komon Monaka!*
ZOOM
What now?
You don't have to be shy, you know...
Ah!
?
Think about it for a second!
Plus, this isn't *Komon Monaka*, it's box-shaped ice cream...
...It's cold.
TREMBLE
TREMBLE
TREMBLE
ガチガチガチ
SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER

You're a mess...
ぐるぐる
WRAP WRAP
Thanks, Daiki.
We left Hiro behind.
You okay? I'll give it back.
I'm fine. I bet Hiro's just talking about me.
ACHOO
WARM
ぬくぬく
If Hiro were a high school student, too, he could've come.
Don't talk about him being our same age. It's creepy.
Hmmm ...
I like the idea, though.
I guess he'd be like this?

Look, Mao, a ninja.
Cool!

Like I could!
Don't eat so many *Komon Monaka* that you get sick, okay?

Ow.
Buy me one.
POKE
POKE
They're selling shuriken.


Yeah, you are.
Pretty enough to work for Lord Komon.
No way... I'm so happy...

N-no, I'm not!
You're super-hyper-mega-extreme cute with those shuriken.

GAAAH!
I accidentally went into an embarrassing fantasy!
Being the same age would be amazing... Almost too amazing!
We could be together all the time!
ぽや
ZONED OUT
Mao?
Huh?!
She's back.
...but Hiro and I are seven years apart.
I don't usually pay attention to it...

...almost more than I can stand.
I love the real Hiro...
...he pulled me out of the darkness.
But still...
Even though I really feel like the anxiety is going to crush me to death.
I want that, no matter who Hiro ends up falling in love with.
This time, I want to become a source of light for him.

SIGH
Bragging on her shark fin...
Magyo
Our dinner was super fancy! There was shark fin in it! Great, right?
...He's close.
How do you really feel about Mao?
Damn it, Daiki.

Thanks to Sugimoto-san, everything's clear.
And now what am I going to do?
I always thought so...
...but this place is stupidly huge when you're all alone.

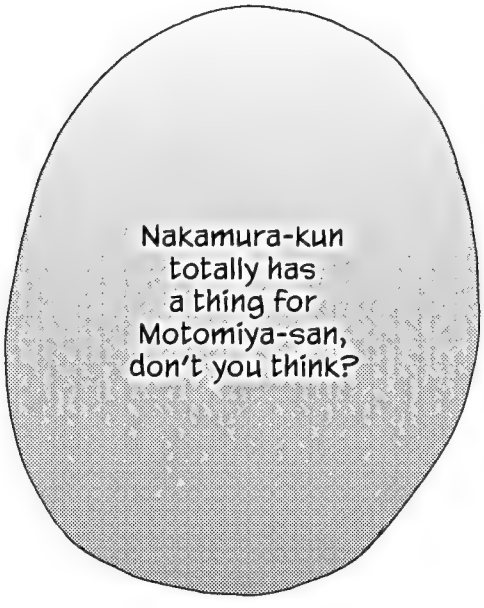
Our parents sure worked hard.
This living room is still huge, even with everyone here.
All the siblings have their own room.
Oh, yeah...
I should make it easier for Hina to come back...
...and buy a dining room table...
...big enough for the whole family.

WHISPER
ナイショ
ナイショ
WHISPER

Well, whatever. I'll just sleep.
POF
No way! I'd be pissed!

They're just talking about boys...
I never know how to talk with everyone when Chi-chan's not around...
And then I saw my boyfriend was texting some prep school girl...

Is Motomiya-san sleeping?
Looks like it.
Hey...


Nakamura-kun totally has a thing for Motomiya-san, don't you think?

WHAAAA?!
N-no!!
He's so obvious. Are they going out?
It's one of those things where you're like, since when?!
It's a misunder-standing!
Wh-what do I do?
Let's just tell everyone we're dating...
It's better than having to keep track of a bunch of lies.
You'd rather that than they know we're living together, right?
Nngh...

Be right back.
See ya.
I bet they are dating...
Was she up?
She was up?
THWUMP
Bath-room!
You know, there are misunder-standings at school and at work, too.
CREAK
I mean, I love Daiki, but as a friend.
Is it because we're such close friends?

D-Daiki. You're up.
You, too. What're you doing?

Just wandering.
Hmm ...
I was trying to call Hiro.
What do you think Hiro's gonna do about that lady at work?
...
Hiro?
You mean, is he going to date her or not?
Yeah.

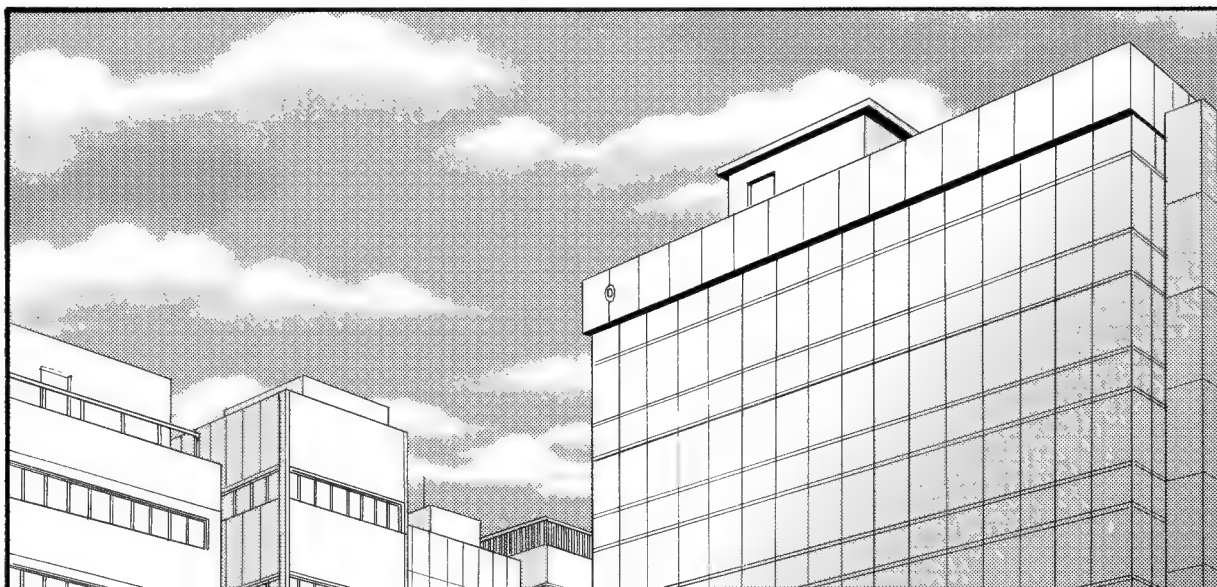
...I see.
It's not like I don't care.
You're pretty concerned for someone who doesn't usually seem to care much about other people's relationships.
Yeah.
But I'll be fine.
I'm not like Hiro.
I just don't do anything unless it benefits me.
If he chooses her, I'll support them.
Yeah, right. You'd cry and cry.
Do you really feel that way?

Mao...

What if you had the choice to go out with me for real?

Sugimoto-san...
Good morning.

Please make some time...
...to meet me this evening.



story 32

Something Important

What if you had the choice to go out with me for real?

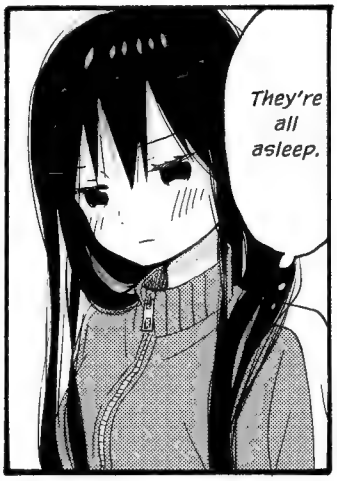
Let's go back.
I was joking.
You're too nice, Daiki.
You're always...
...always...

...always...
...telling jokes like that to cheer me up.
Mao! I'm...!

It's nothing...

I'm so wound up about this that it made Daiki try a joke like that.
もぞ
WIGGLE
もぞ
WIGGLE

カラ
カラ
CLATTER


They're all asleep.

ぐ
zzz
zzz
ぐ

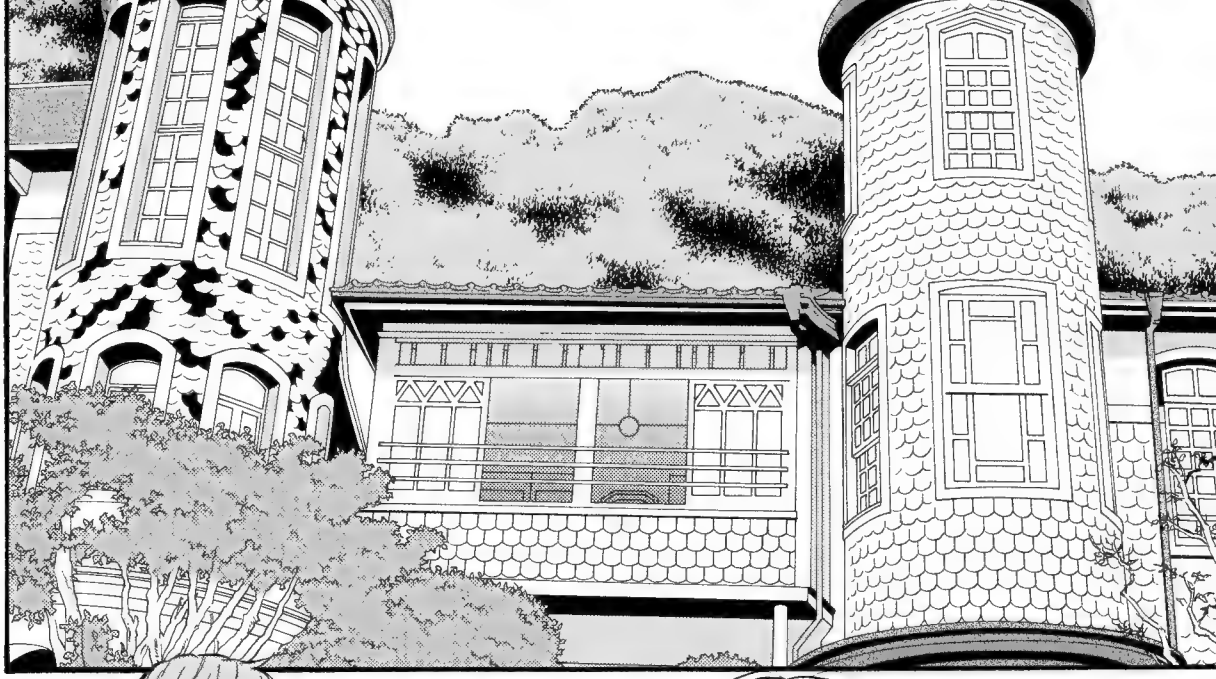
Tomorrow I'm going to cheer up and get really enthusiastic!

Okay!

It's gotta be annoying...
Am I being annoying?!

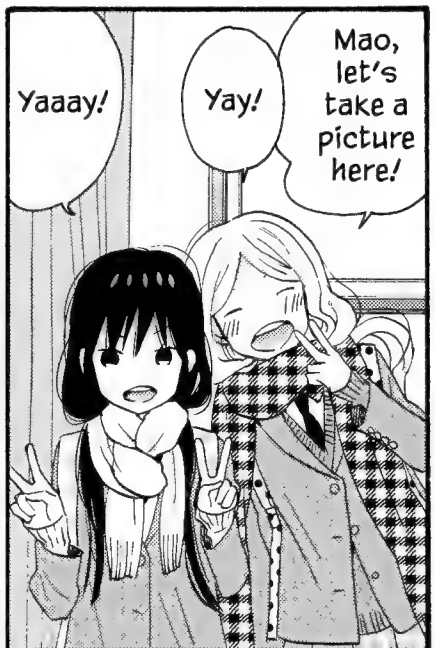
Well, if nothing else, I have to find some way to make it up to Daiki.

Huh? You're still up?
Bath-room?
Mn...
SNORE
ぐぉー
SNORE
ぐぉー
I'm going to sleep.
...
ボスッ
BWOOF
Damn it!
Why did I say it at a time like that?! What's wrong with me?!



Oooh! This Western-style house is amazing!
Kobe's so fashionable!

You, too, Daiki. We can send it to Hiro.


Mao, let's take a picture here!
Yay!
Yaaay!

Daiki-kun, did you really live in a place like this?!
No, I didn't live anywhere like this.

Really?
I'm fine.
...
Ha ha, you're scaring me a little bit, Mao.
YAY
YAY
いえーい
Energy! Fun!
Daiki's acting weird.
I wonder if I'm still acting like I'm wound up about things...
Wh- Oh, oh, no, it's fine!
Chi-chan, you and Oda-kun should take a pic together, too!

I'm meeting someone.
Where you going?
Oh, a friend from over here.
Sorry, I'm gonna step outside.
Wha?!
Chi-chan, it's gotta be the girl Daiki likes in Kobe.
!!
I dunno. I think so.
Are you even paying attention anymore?
I bet you do!
Whaaaa?! What are you saying, Mao? Are you crazy?!

Daiki-kun!
I really want Mao to be happy with Hiro-san, of course...
But I'd feel so bad for Daiki-kun...
Can we come, too?
We shouldn't get split up, or whatever ...
I don't care. I'm just meeting my cousin.

おみやげ
Ooh, a cousin.
See, Mao, it's just his cousin.
Let's go, Daiki-kun.

*Souvenirs

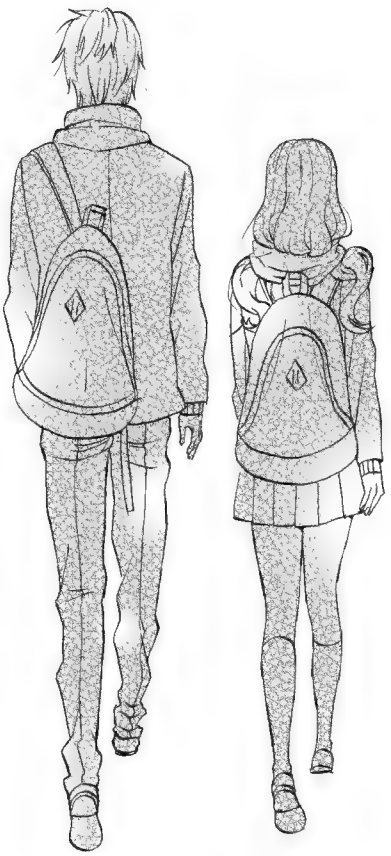
But Chi-chan likes Oda-kun.
Chi-chan and Daiki kind of look good together.
It seems nice to be bound somehow to your crush.
And Daiki and his cousin ...
...

…at the two of them.

…when he looks…

…Oda-kun is thinking…

I wonder what…

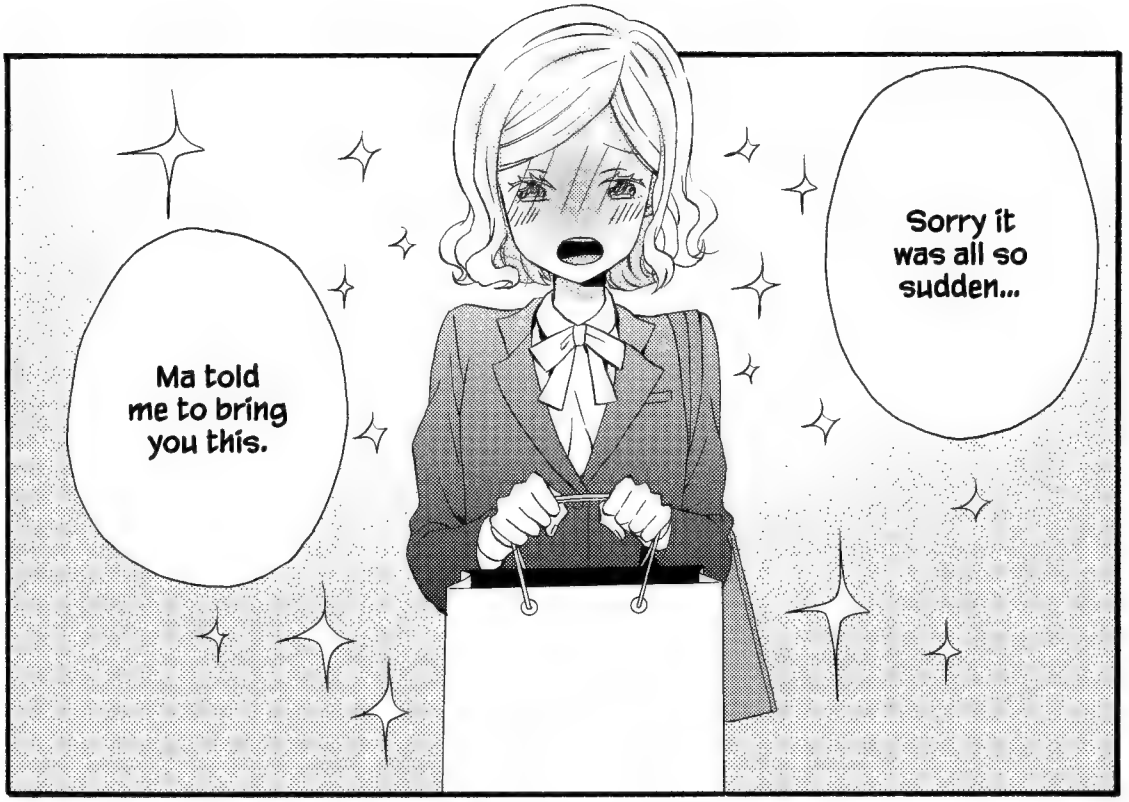


A guy who suits her?
I think people are happiest when they're with the person they love.

I hope she finds a good guy who really suits her and lives happily ever after.

No...
I feel like I needed to be hit over the head with it.

...
...
Oh, man, that's the most obvious thing ever, isn't it?


Sorry it was all so sudden...
Ma told me to bring you this.

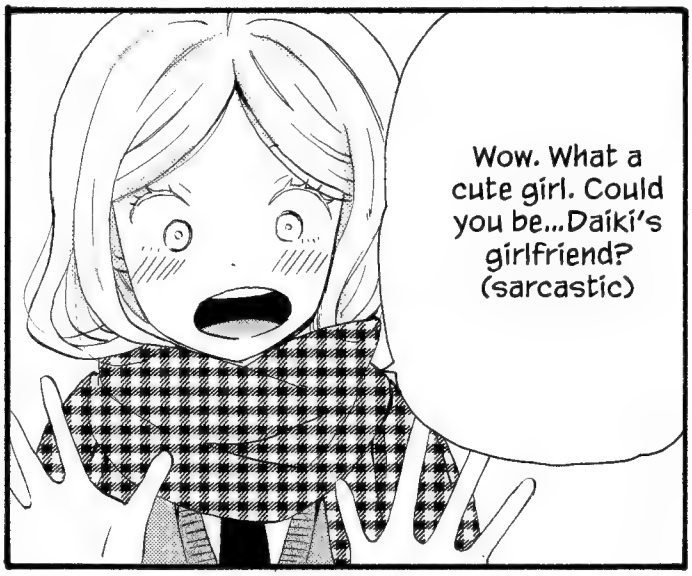
お
お
お
お
WHOAAA
お
お
AA

You could have just mailed it.
She told me to come see yer face.
She thinks I missed ya.
A hand-knit sweater?! I can't wear this!
You doin' okay?
Yeah.

Hello.
We have the pleasure of being friends with Daiki-kun.
H-hi there!

Are those guys yer friends?
She found us!
She figured us out!
BA-DUM

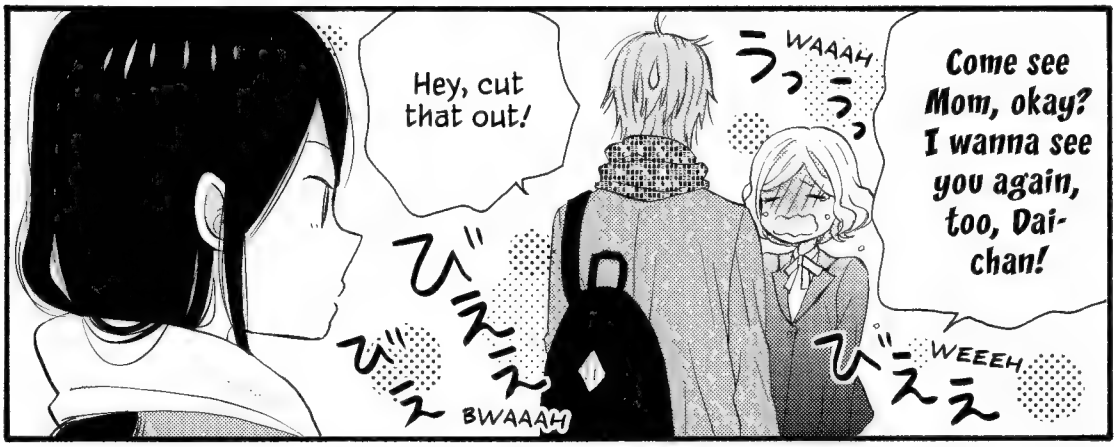
...my God...
Oooh...


Wow. What a cute girl. Could you be...Daiki's girlfriend? (sarcastic)

...
...!

Sh-she looks like she's way too good for Daiki.
Wow... Nice to meet you.
I thought Daiki just had cute taste in accessories. Looks like he also has good taste in girls!

Okay.
See you.
Well, Otoha, I'm taking off.
How could we be?
We're family.


Hey, cut that out!
うっ WAAAH うっ
Come see Mom, okay? I wanna see you again, too, Dai-chan!
びえええ BWAAAH
びえええ WEEEH

W-well ...
Huh?
Chi-chan, why'd you say that?

There's really nothing between us, so I don't mind.
But... Daiki.
I'm saying it's fine.
PLIP
FSHHH

Oh, no, I have a telescoping umbrella.
Should we go inside somewhere?
It's starting to rain.
FSHHHH
Yes?
Um...

Everything in my text is true.
I like you.
I've loved you... ...for so long.
FSHHHH
Because you've been so good to me, Nakamura-san.

W-well, that's it.
I'm sorry.
...
You're an amazing person, Sugimoto-san.
I'm honored to know you feel this way about me.
But...
...I have someone who is precious to me.

I know that already!
I know all I'm doing is bothering you!
I know I'm making a scene!
I have to start hating you, though...
...so please don't say such nice things to me.

Sorry.

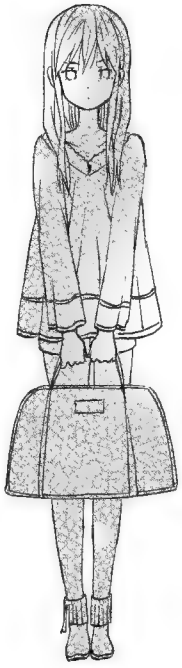
...I'm thinking about someone else entirely.

Even right now...

But I'm not a nice person, really.

I'm sorry.

The high school girl I was friends with as a kid, who I thoughtlessly took in.



The first person in my long-awaited, brand-new family: Mao.

...who waltzed her way into this empty house.

She was like a kitten...

She was useless without me, really.

She couldn't feed herself; she couldn't clean up after herself.

Without me, she couldn't do anything.

A selfish, stubborn little crybaby of a kitten.

I'd been putting on a brave face.

I kept that thought in my heart the whole time.

"I don't have a problem with living on my own."

...that wasn't how it was at all.

But...

Being with her made me remember the feeling of being with family for the first time in a while.

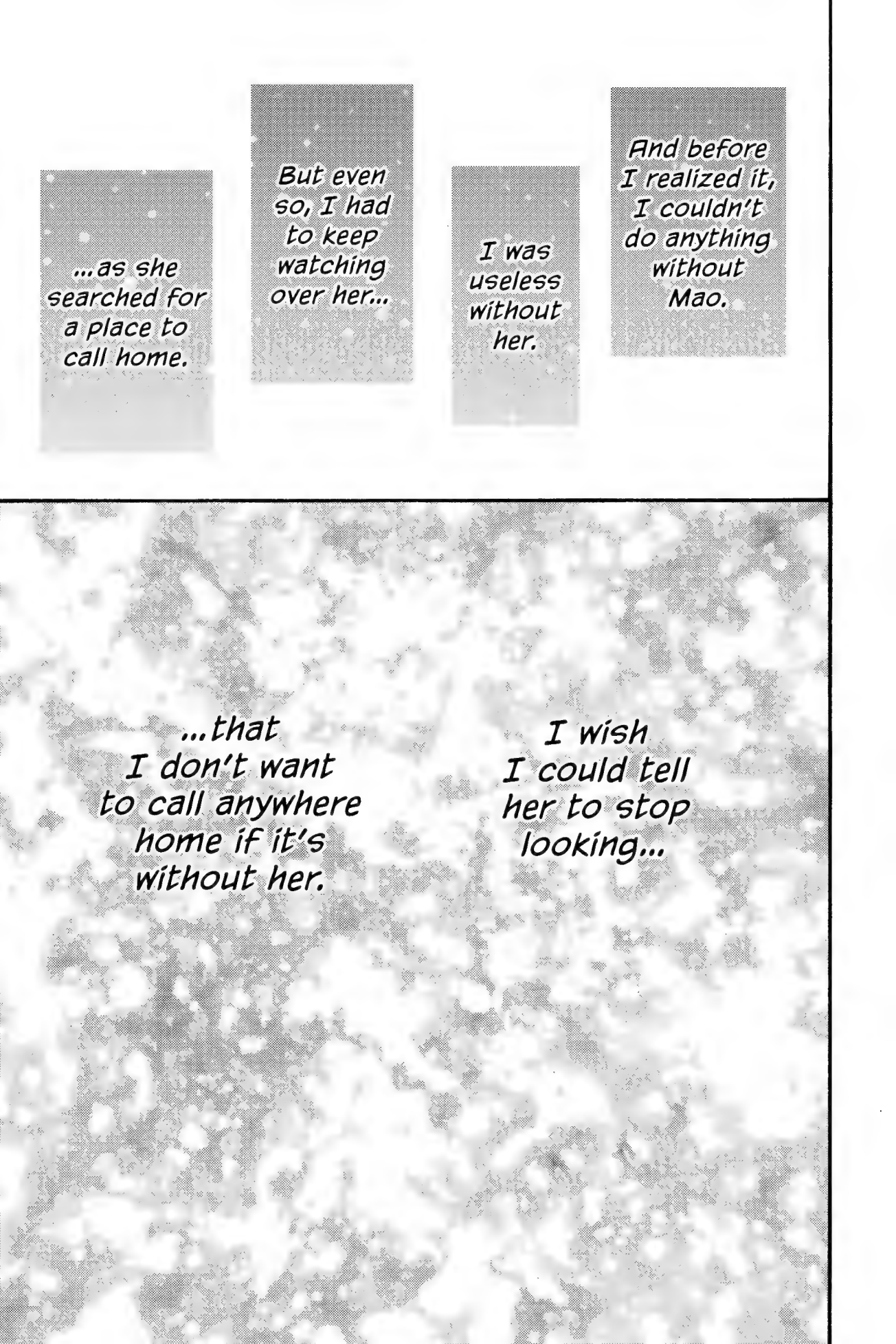
Was I actually afraid to face the fact that I was lonely?

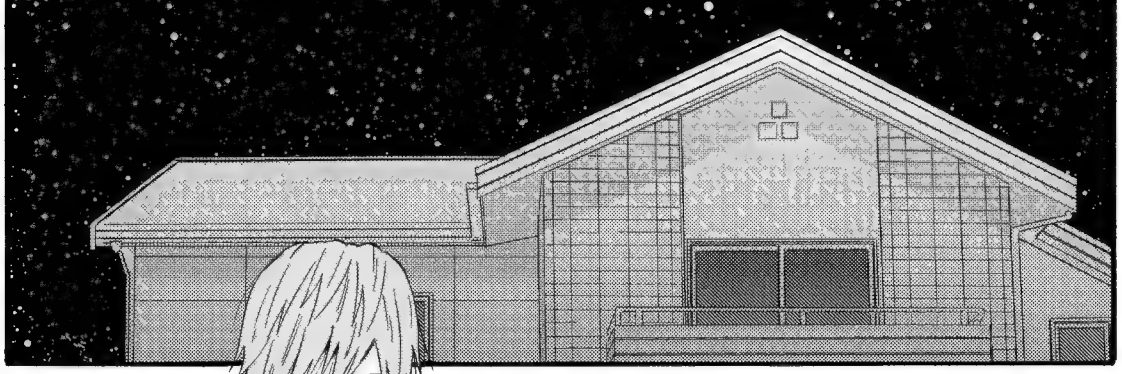
Or was I simply afraid to face the family I hadn't really spoken to in a while?

I'm not sure, at this point.

It's like she told me...

...it was stupid not to be honest with them.


...as she searched for a place to call home.
But even so, I had to keep watching over her...
I was useless without her.
And before I realized it, I couldn't do anything without Mao.
...that I don't want to call anywhere home if it's without her.
I wish I could tell her to stop looking...



We're home!

I actually just got home.
Hiro...! You're home early.
Did you have fun?

Welcome back.

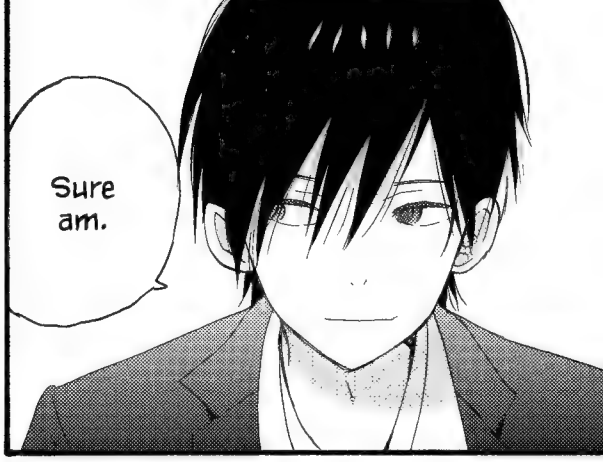
SMIRK
ドヤア
SMIRK
ドヤ
Th-this sure is some-thing.
Sorry, but that wasn't a compliment!
We did!
Yup, it was fun.
Here, a present.
That's great. They'll be happy.
I got one for Hina-chan and one for back home, too!
How about you? How'd things go with that lady?
Daiki.
You're going too far, even for a joke.

What?
...
Plus, what about you–
Never mind...
Dinner?
If it's nothing, then I'm going to get in the bath and go to bed.
Don't need it.

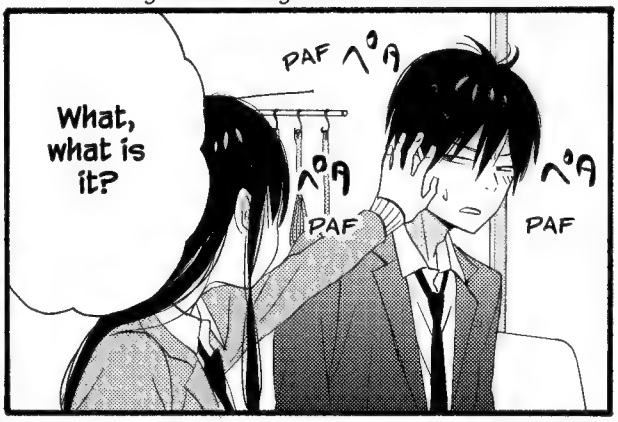
Daiki's been acting weird.
SHWF
We met Daiki's cousin in Kobe.
I wonder if there's something between them.
Otoha?
Was that it? She had this airy feel about her.
It made me think she had a really warm and loving family life.
I was wondering how they must have felt about that.
But Daiki came back here anyway.

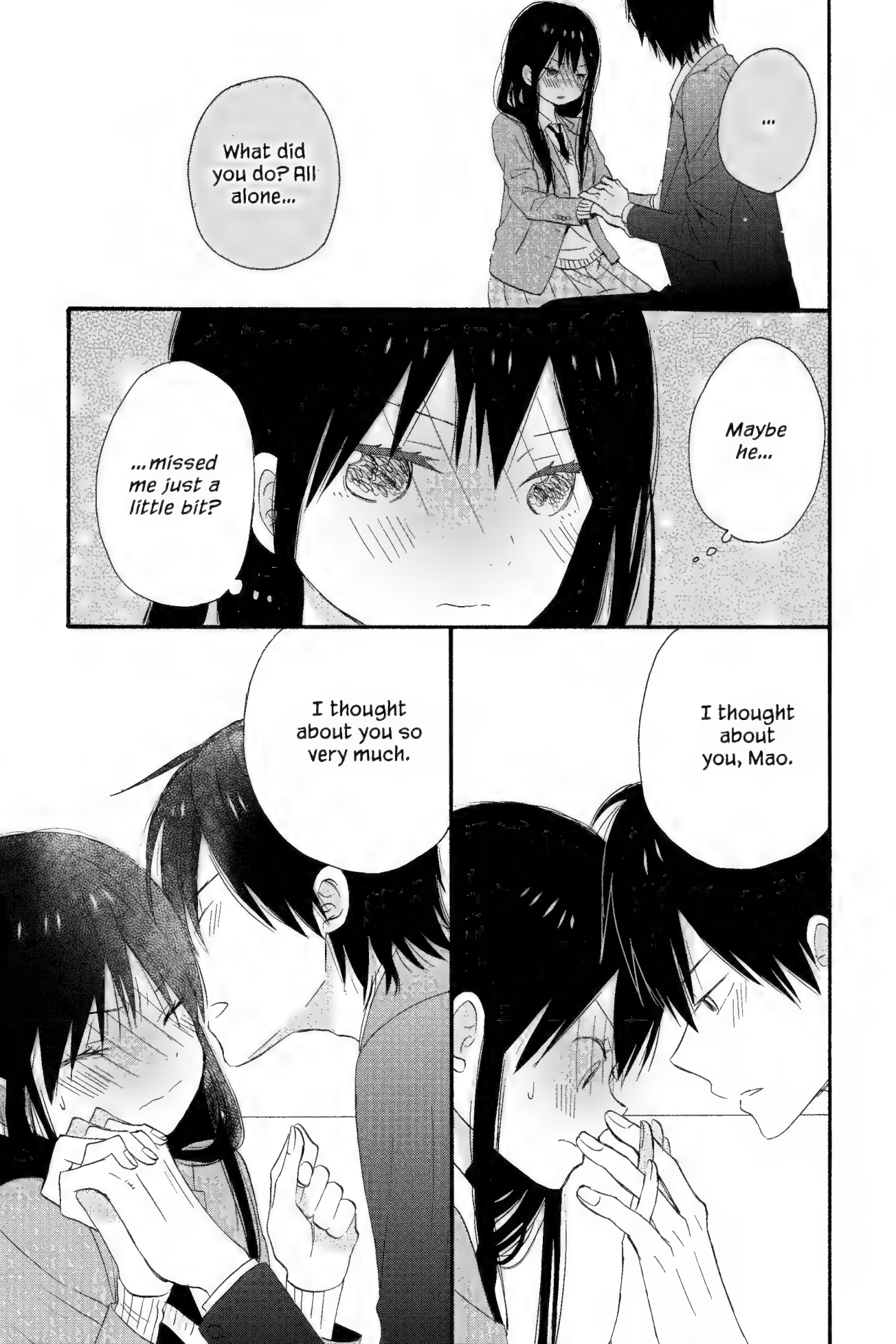
If you're gonna go to Kansai, you should visit the Toei Uzumasa Park!
You just wanna go back.
When things calm down, I should go visit them.
When Hina-chan comes home, we should all go together.
That's not it! Chi-chan and Oda both had fun, too.
I see...
Their intimacy points went up!
Uzumasa is totally a great place.
Anyway ...

When you say things, it's like they magically start to seem like they're gonna come true. It's weird.
She's gotta! It was so fun!
Will Hina want to?
You changed its name.
Then I'll say it over and over!
When Hina-chan comes home, we'll go see Komon Land!
Thanks.
You really are useless without me.
You need me, so I'll have to come, too.



*A girl who's tough on the outside but soft on the inside.




What did you do? All alone...
...
Maybe he...
...missed me just a little bit?
I thought about you so very much.
I thought about you, Mao.

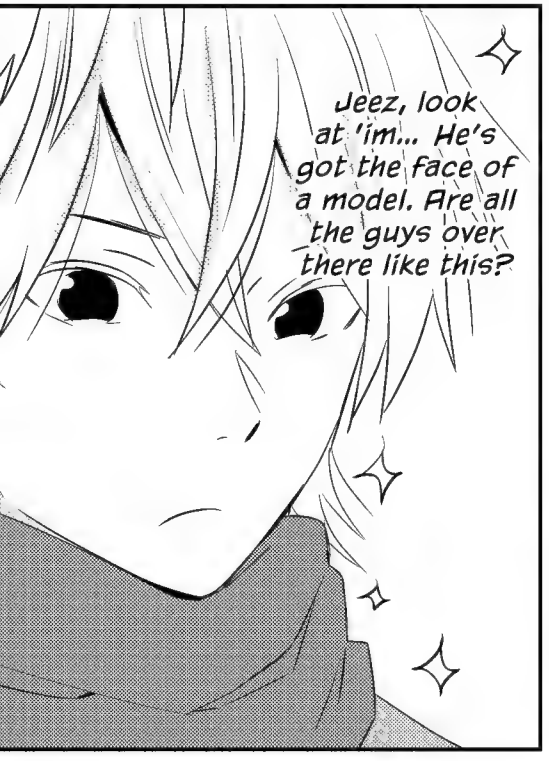
KISS
ちゅっ
WHAAAA?!
Owwww.

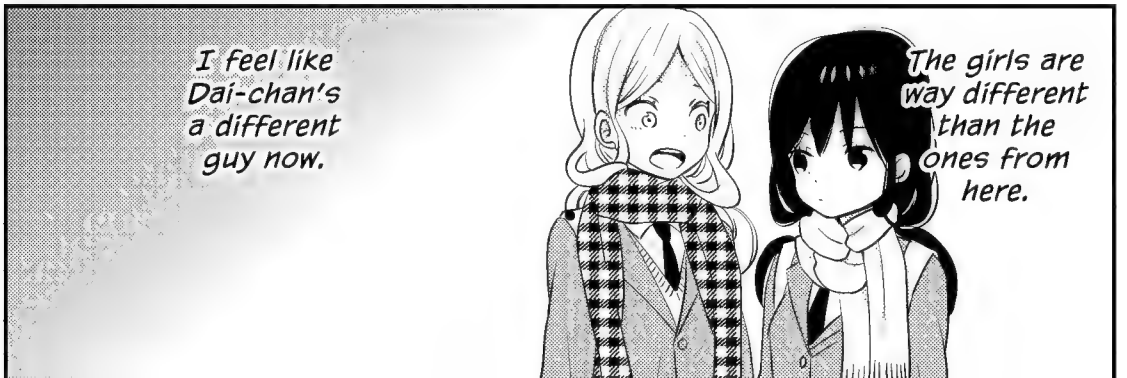
WAH.
Wah.
Not gonna work today.
Today you just have to accept it.
KISS
ちゅっ

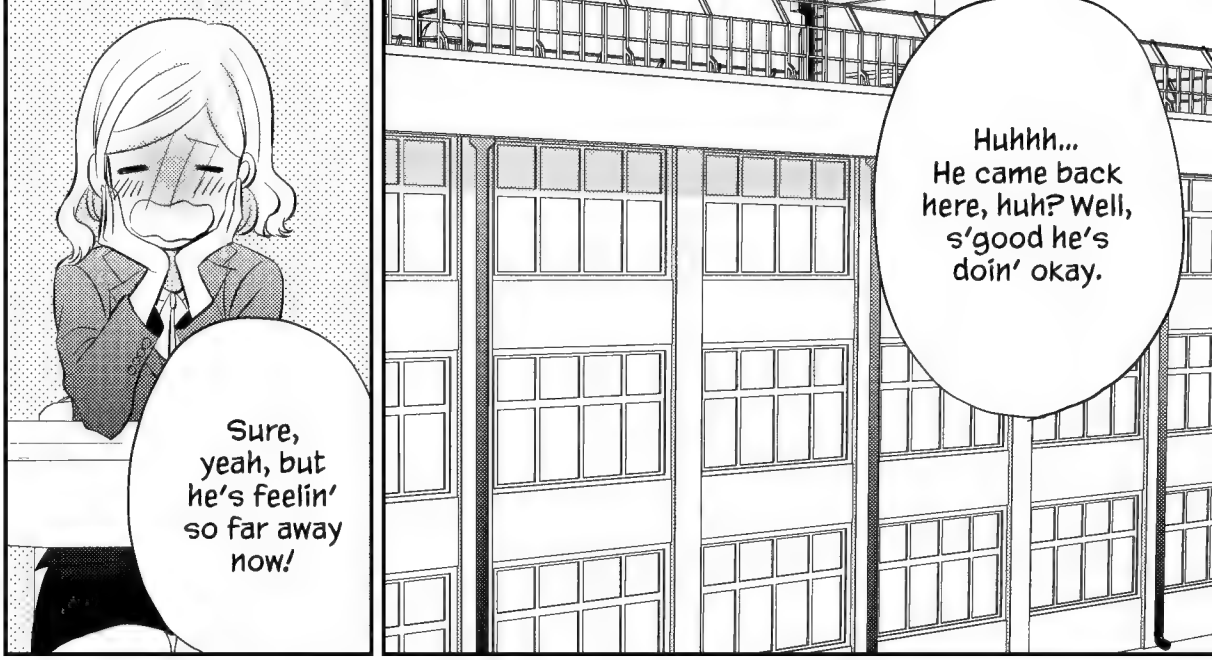
To be continued...

EXTRA CHAPTER

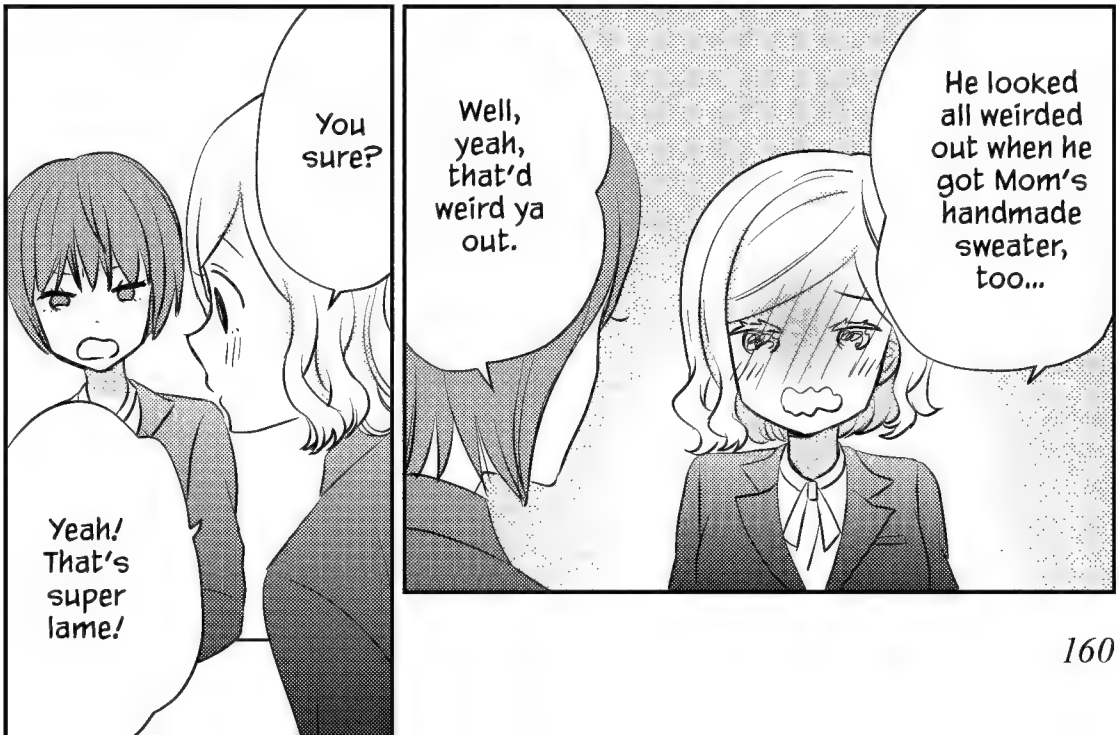
A Girl's Worries



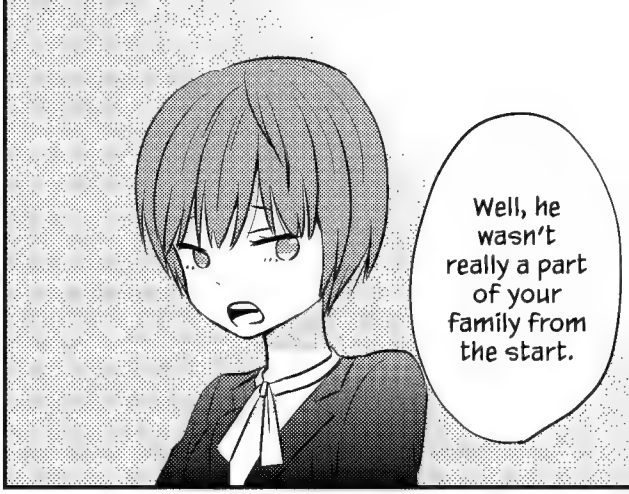



Huhhh... He came back here, huh? Well, s'good he's doin' okay.
Sure, yeah, but he's feelin' so far away now!

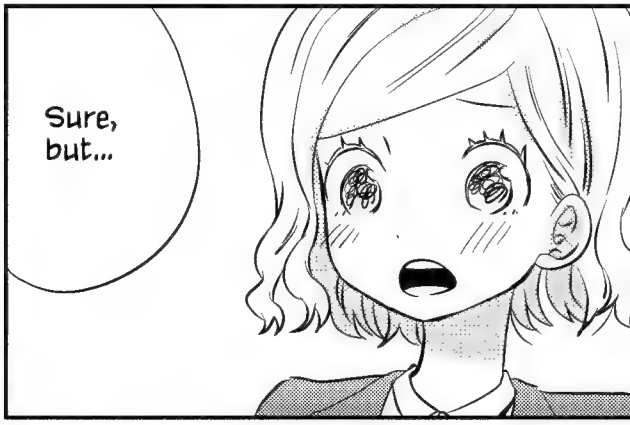
And he didn't seem real happy to see me for the first time in a while, either!
Well, that's just how he is.


He looked all weirded out when he got Mom's handmade sweater, too...
Well, yeah, that'd weird ya out.
You sure?
Yeah! That's super lame!

Still, he ain't family anymore, so you guys're gonna get further apart!
That ain't it.
Aw, but Ma worked so hard to make it, though!
Huh?
He's not family anymore just 'cause he moved away?


Well, he wasn't really a part of your family from the start.

Why're you so sad?
It's more of a problem if you are family, right?
Whaaa?

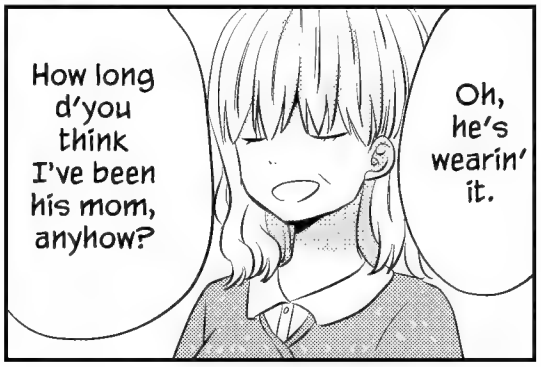

Sure, but...

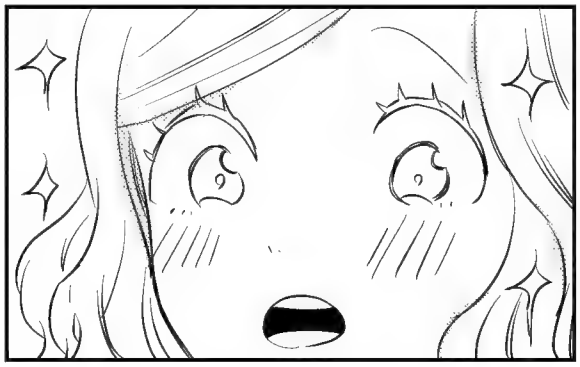
I knew we had ta let Hiro have him back, though...
SNIFFLE

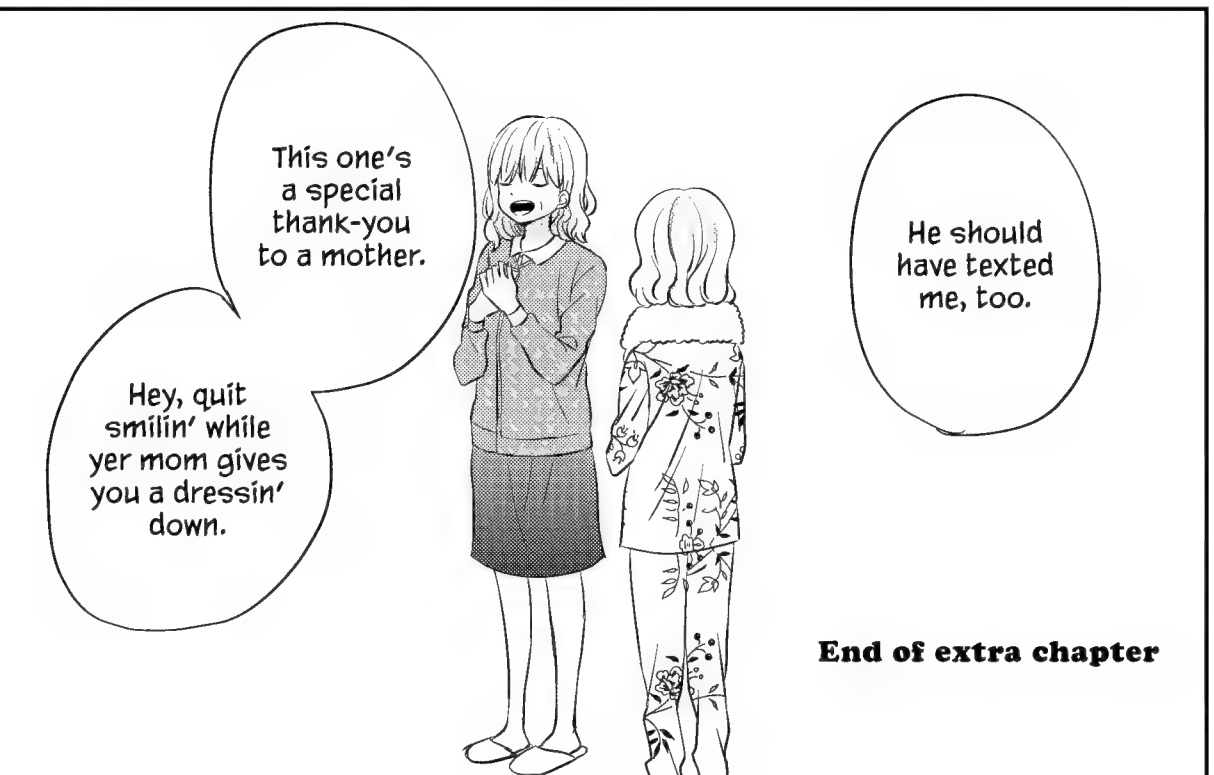
Why you cryin'? Cut it out!
Your nose is runnin'!
WEH

But if he ain't family...
...
...and he gets far away...
...I just feel like we ain't connected at all.

WAAAAH
The horror.
If this keeps up, he's gonna forget I ever existed!
He doesn't even text me anymore...
WAH
But he never did.
He never calls!
WAH
He never did that, either.
Hey Ma, hand-knit sweaters aren't cool, I heard.
What, why? They're just fine!
Right?!
But my friend said Dai-chan ain't gonna wear it.

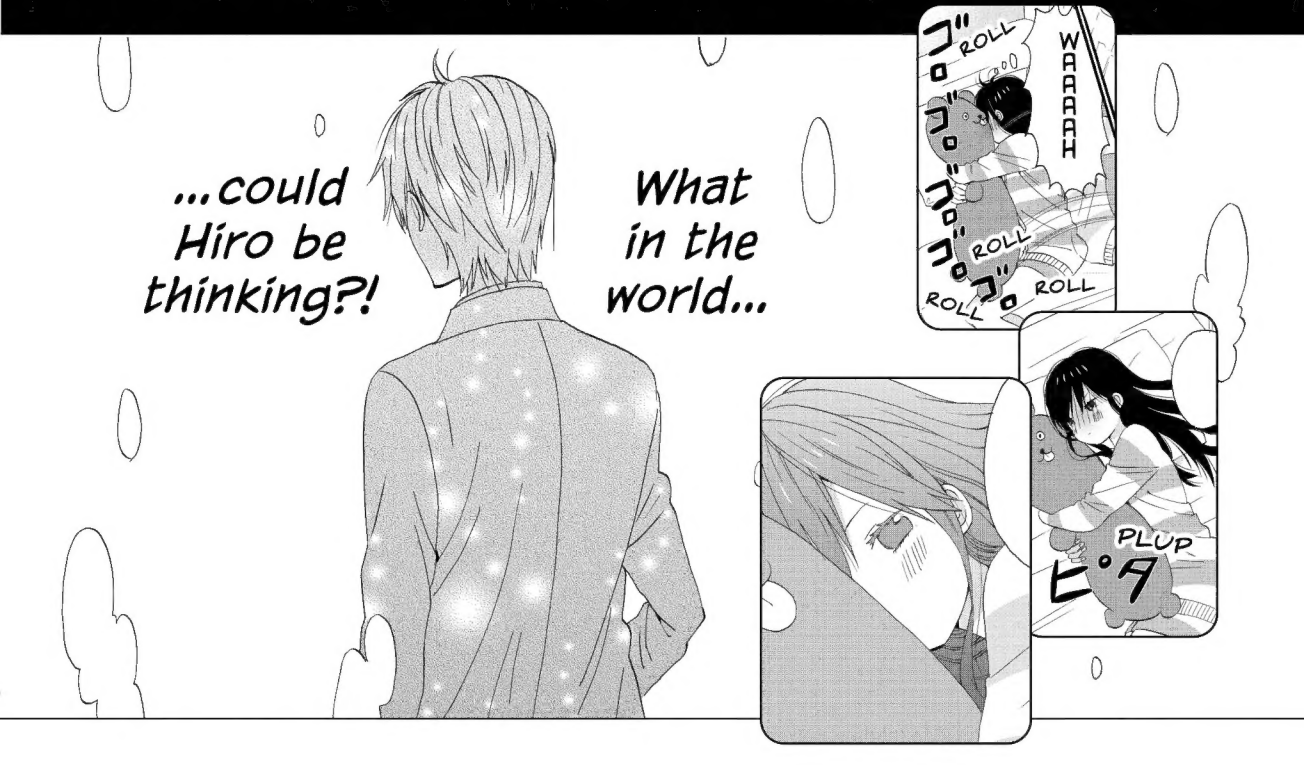


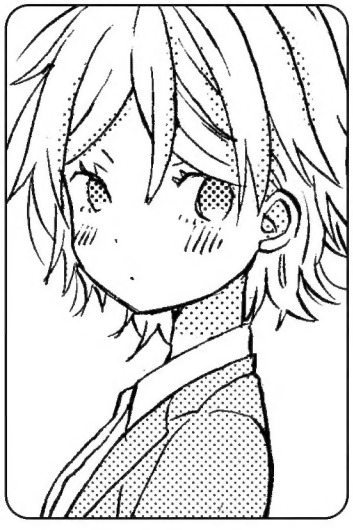



This one's a special thank-you to a mother.
Hey, quit smilin' while yer mom gives you a dressin' down.
He should have texted me, too.

End of extra chapter

Shockingly, it was Hiro who kissed her!





What fruit will the efforts of these two bear?!

HOUSE of the SUN 9

Popular right now!

House of the Sun 8

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